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HOW WILL IT END?

BY

AGNES STRICKLAND.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HOW WILL IT END?

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a lowering cloud on the brow of Colonel Briggs when Althea and his sister entered the breakfast-room; scarcely was grace concluded, when he angrily observed: "A strange woman entered my house this morning with Packman Hobbes."

"I am happy to say it was my maid, Millicent Hill," replied Althea.

"How the plague did that vessel of evil report find her way hither?" cried Briggs. "Verily, I have a great mind to order Packman Hobbes to be hanged for his impudence in bringing her."

“Fie upon you, brother, for violating the sixth commandment in your heart against so humble and harmless a creature as Humphrey Hobbes, in return for his acting the part of a Good Samaritan to the poor stranger maiden, whom you had cruelly turned adrift on the wide world,” said Mrs. Kezia Briggs ; “I tell you, I was just going to send Michael Moore to Garstang to see after her when she happily made her appearance.”

“I won’t suffer her to remain under my roof,” exclaimed Briggs ; “she will corrupt all the household, and breed a mutiny in my garrison.”

“I will be surety for her good behaviour, and will endeavour to correct her faults,” said Mrs. Kezia. “She was placed in Althea’s service by our good aunt, and shall not be removed without sufficient cause, for she is necessary to her comfort ; so that point is settled.”

Briggs uttered a low growl, but ceased to

contest the point, for the only person in the world who ever carried a point with him was his sister. Meantime the chaplain, who had impatiently been waiting for an opportunity of addressing a question to Althea, took advantage of a momentary pause in the conversation to endeavour to extract some information from her on the subject of her alarm on the preceding evening, by observing :

“Thou wert plunged in a deep trance when we returned from evening worship in our tabernacle last night, and on reviving thou didst verily stare upon us with troubled looks ; yea, and thy communications were of skulls.”

“Thine, at present, savoureth not of that which skulls are generally supposed to contain when in the flesh, Master Nobbs,” said Mrs. Kezia Briggs, sharply.

The chaplain cogitated for several moments in silence, while vainly endeavouring to

unriddle the drift of his patroness's speech ; the meaning at length striking him, he suddenly exclaimed :

“ I cry you mercy, worthy lady, you mean brains ; but I would fain hear of Mistress Woodville concerning her vision of dry bones, and whether the skulls spake to her concerning the cause of their so oft appearance.”

There was a native love of drollery and mischief inherent in Althea, that induced her in reply to throw a mysterious glance at her guardian ; she said nothing, but began to eat her breakfast. Briggs was evidently much disconcerted. Elkanah Nobbs elevated his eyebrows into an expressive arch of wonder and expectation. Kerenhappuch, who stood as usual behind her lady's chair, exchanged a look with the chaplain. Mrs. Kezia alone took no part in the pantomime, for as she was looking down at the time, the glance which had excited so much speculation, passed unobserved by her.

“I prythee, fair Mistress Woodville,” said the chaplain, in a caressing tone, “reveal to us the nature of thy visitation; peradventure the disburdening thy mind may yield thee infinite comfort.”

“Master Nobbs,” replied Althea, very demurely, “I am not accustomed to make confessions even to the clergy of mine own church.”

“So much the better, sister, for then thou hast the less of popery to repent thee of.”

“Sister?” exclaimed the high-born beauty, regarding the puritan with a look that seemed to say: “How came we of kin?”

“A truce to this folly,” interposed Colonel Briggs, to whom the subject of conversation was peculiarly unpleasant; “Can ye not find more profitable employ for that member of the fleshly tabernacle called the tongue than to exercise its faculties in vain brabblements, or in gossiping queries and rejoinders?”

“Certes, my gracious guardian, your

rebuke is seasonably bestowed on your inquisitive chaplain," said Althea; "and I trust it will have the effect of freeing me from his persevering questions respecting circumstances which, in my humble opinion, concern no one but yourself."

Althea had quickly gathered from the words let fall by Mrs. Kezia, that the apparition of the skulls—whether proceeding from supernatural causes, or from the juggling trick of a concealed agent—bore reference to some exploit of her brother's, and was intended for his peculiar annoyance. Moved partly by a mischievous desire of paying off a few of the grudges she owed her guardian, and partly by the girlish inclination she felt of dissipating the dulness of her enforced sojourn at Calgarth Hall, by drawing amusement from circumstances so extraordinary, she secretly resolved to humour the business by such conduct as she thought would be most productive of entertainment to herself—

and mortification to Colonel Briggs—against whom she cherished increasing dislike.

Such conduct was, indeed, widely opposite to the established etiquette among heroines, whether of the olden times or of more modern days. But Althea resembled little these ideal pieces of perfection. She was, in fact, full of woman's faults and woman's charms; by nature, sprightly and sweet-tempered; but self-willed and haughty under constraint. The deep melancholy which marked her was like her mourning habit thrown round her by accidental circumstance, and the sparkling vivacity of her character was checked and repressed alone by the effect of her recent grief and present uncongenial situation; yet it would occasionally manifest itself in liveliness of repartee, in whim, in caprice, and even in waywardness.

CHAPTER II.

GREAT gloom was thrown over the family at noon by the arrival of a messenger from Cartmel, to announce the melancholy fact that the bodies of the coachman, Abraham Barker, commonly known by the name of Antipope, the two footmen, and two of the troopers had, on the retiring of the waters, been found on the sands drowned.

“The deaths of Antipope and the two footmen rest on their own heads,” observed Colonel Briggs, after an agitated pause, “seeing they detached the coach-horses and fled to save their lives, which was the means of losing them.”

Althea turned pale and shuddered. “But

for the generous daring of Major Philipson I should have been even as those unfortunate men," said she.

"Not so," replied Colonel Briggs; "for your time was not come."

All was sad and quiet at Calgarth Hall for several days after the fate of the poor men was known.

Meantime spring advanced, the chestnut trees put forth their snowy blossoms in the well-wooded park, and Althea returned from her daily rambles by the sparkling Troutbeck with her hands full of lilies-of-the-valley. Sometimes she longed to extend her walks beyond the walls, which at that time shut in the park, but Briggs was inexorable, and even his kind sister shook her head and told her she must not think of anything so rash, when Althea expressed her ardent desire of exploring the old Roman road, commonly known by the familiar name of High Street, nor even of tracing the course of that loveliest of moun-

tain rivulets—the Troutbeck, on its dancing course, singing its own wild song among the broken crags that form its bed.

“No, my child; you must content you, for the present, with seeing it rushing through Calgarth Park, and pouring its tributary waters into Windermere,” said Mrs. Kezia, “unless you can persuade my brother to take you behind him, on his sure-footed black mare, for a ride among the mountains.”

“Such uncongenial companionship would spoil the fairest scenes in the world,” said Althea, turning away.

At supper that evening she astounded Colonel Briggs and his serving men, by declaring that she regarded the ghostly visitations at Calgarth Hall as a seasonable relief to the monotony of its general routine, and the dulness of its human inhabitants.

Mrs. Kezia held up her hands, and shook her head at this sally. Kerenhappuch ejaculated a groan of horror from behind her

mistress's chair, which was echoed by Joseph Foxcraft, the butler, from the sideboard.

"After such an acknowledgment as that," said Colonel Briggs, "I, as your guardian, cannot answer it to my conscience to leave you exposed to the temptations and assaults of evil spirits while the family attend evening exhortations at the chapel, and, therefore, I do insist on your going with us to-night."

"What penalty shall I incur by my refusal?" demanded Althea.

"Nay, ask me not that, for I were loth to proceed to extremities with you, Althea Woodville," replied the Colonel, in a tone half-threatening, half-caressing.

"Then, Colonel Briggs, I tell you, plainly, that I never will enter your schismatical conventicle; for though I am, virtually, your prisoner, I will maintain my independence of principles and act as a free woman in defiance of your tyranny,"

"How, are ye both enemies to peace!"

interposed Mrs. Kezia Briggs ; “ Althea Woodville, you are a maiden of many and proud words, taking a delight in aggravating his infirmity of temper for your own amusement, and are at the same time on the watch to catch up affronts almost before they are offered, which is a property altogether unlovely in woman. And you, brother, should restrain your surly crossness when you speak to one whose years are as nothing in comparison with yours. Go to ; you are as ungentle to her as she is froward towards you ; and I counsel ye both to preserve utter silence when together, or let your communications be no other than yea or nay, since whatsoever ye say more than these is offensive, not only to yourselves but to your hearers.”

“ I am resolved to follow your sensible advice, madam,” replied Althea ; “ and shall consider his silence as a mercy cheaply purchased by mine.”

“ Verily, Althea Woodville, I shall be bold,

with a good conscience, to speak in mine own house either my pleasure or my displeasure ; and I will reprove or commend thee after mine own fashion, let it offend whom it will. And though thy proud heart may swell, and thy tongue rebel against me, yet it shall avail thee nothing," rejoined Briggs.

"Fie upon you, brother," said Mrs. Kezia ; "you are guilty of much wrong in treating your ward thus ; and I will neither suffer her to be taunted nor tyrannically controlled whilst I am mistress of your house."

"Sister, I command your silence ; and, furthermore, I desire you to remember that you have no concern with Althea, who is my ward and not yours ; and when her wayward and froward spirit is properly subdued, she shall, in due time, become my wife."

Althea laughed, disdainfully. "It is in sooth no marvel that you have been enforced to remain in the forlorn estate of bachelorhood, to so advanced a period of life, since such are

your ways of wooing ;” then pausing, and surveying him with the most provoking coolness, she sang the fragment of an old ballad, which opportunely occurred to her memory :

“But woo you ill or woo you well,
You’ll woo in vain to me,
The passing-bell shall toll my knell
Ere I will marry thee.”

Master Elkanah, to disperse the rising tempest, said : “May I presume to remind you, honoured sir, that the hour for the evening pouring-forth hath arrived. Is it your pleasure to proceed to the chapel?”

“To the chapel!” replied Briggs, seizing at the same time Althea’s wrist ; “and,” continued he, “I will not leave this froward lamb out of the fold, but enforce her to come in.”

“There is no resisting masculine strength,” said she, reluctantly submitting to be led into the chapel.

Briggs triumphantly placed her by his side in the canopied pew devoted to the family worship of the possessors of Calgarth Hall.

The congregation consisted of the garrison ; twelve troopers, in belted buff, who acted as choristers and clerks, commencing the service by singing a psalm. There were likewise present all the serving men and maids of the Calgarth household, together with some few of the tenants, who had embraced the tenets and manners of the growing sect of puritans.

The sermon of gracious Master Nobbs was remarkable for nothing but extreme lengthiness, and for perplexed quotations from perplexed and perplexing writers of sectarian divinity, some of whose tenets Colonel Briggs, who was in no very dulcet humour, thought proper to contradict aloud, from his state pew, more than once. This had the good effect of rescuing Althea from the influence of slumber, to which she was about to yield, till such unusual behaviour in a place of worship roused her and amused her so much that she had some difficulty in restraining her laughter.

Master Nobbs had selected his text, "Prophesy upon these dry bones," from Ezekiel. Being rather apposite to the thoughts that were still uppermost in his mind, he held forth till the shades of evening were deepening into darkness, when he paused to ask for lights; at the same time taking up the hour-glass before him, he was, according to the custom of Hugh Peters, and other popular preachers, of whom he was a humble imitator, about to turn it, with the customary remark, "We will now, beloved, by the help of grace, take another glass together," when the arrival of the lights showed, to his inexpressible horror, and that of his whole congregation, two skulls quietly reposing on the pulpit-cushion, one on his right hand and the other on his left.

"Satan, avoid!" ejaculated the terrified preacher, dropping the hour-glass from his paralyzed fingers among his congregation, which glass, unwittingly descending on the hard pate of Samuel Stunner, was shivered

into a thousand pieces, and the sand shed partly in his eyes and partly on his collar-band. And as Stunner mistook the blow for a corporeal attack of the foul fiend on his person, he received it with a dismal howl. Then followed screaming and fainting among the household damsels, and exclamations of horror and consternation among serving-men and men-at-arms. Colonel Briggs relaxed his grasp from Althea's wrist, and sat as one petrified for a moment, which moment was seized by his fair captive to effect her escape from his immediate vicinity, and take refuge by the side of Mrs. Kezia.

When the confusion seemed nearly at its climax, it was trebled by a volley fired at the chapel from the heights above, which did no other damage than to occasion a general smash of glass in all the windows. This salute was followed by a reiteration of shrieks from the female servants and an access of terror to the men.

Mrs. Kezia Briggs was the only person in the chapel who had remained perfectly undismayed at either circumstance. Rising from her seat, and addressing the pale, affrighted girl by her side, she said :

“The mystery of the skulls is now explained. It is a trick of Robin Philipson’s, and but fools’ play after all.”

The moment these words reached the ear of Colonel Briggs, he roused himself from his stupor, and stepping to the shattered windows, through which the unexpected volley had been discharged, he guarded his face with his Geneva Bible and looked out upon the lake ; but his caution was unnecessary, his assailants having contented themselves with shortening his evening sermon, and were already out of the reach of reprisals.

“Confound that deboshed malignant, Robert Philipson,” exclaimed Briggs, half drawing his sword and returning it with a

clash into the sheath. "I would give half my patrimony if I could slip a cord about his neck, and see him dangling in the death-struggle over yon gateway."

He clenched his hand and set his teeth as he uttered these words, and turning from the window, he leaned over the gilded balustrade of his gallery pew and shouted to the terrified and agitated group below :

"Stint in your belling, ye wretched women ! Come forth from chapel, and cease flustering the men-at-arms with your noise. Here you Bethuliel, see to the defences of the house. Look to the musquetoons, and give forth to every man a double quantum of powder and munition of all sort. Why don't you stir, you slow-footed beast ?"

"May it like your honour," cried Bethuliel, exalting his voice above the confusion of tongues in the chapel. I care not to stir unless I have company to aid me from the attacks of ghostly enemies."

“What is the wretched dastard afraid of?” shouted Briggs.

“May it like your honour, of what you are afraid of, and everybody else — the skulls!”

“May the foul fiend fly away not only with the skulls, but your numskull to boot,” vociferated Briggs, stamping with rage.

At this invocation, every one in the chapel became silent, and cast terrified glances towards the pulpit, and Bethuliel ejaculated:

“It is even according to thy words, colonel, for lo, they are gone!”

“Ay,” roared Samuel Stunner, “as I can witness to my cost, for behold they flew down on my head, which they have sorely damaged.”

“Yea,” exclaimed Judy, “and I will take Bible oath I saw ’em flit deawn upon thy head actilly in flame o’ fire.”

“I peartly guess ’twere evil one hisself,” rejoined Joseph Foxcraft, the butler, “forbye

this token, that summut have flitted away wi' good Parson Nobbs, his preaching-glass, and peaper note-buk o' searmun, that had aw his awfu' and purdigious larning in it, that folk thowt coomed out o' own head."

"Judas, I defy thee!" cried Elkanah Nobbs, rearing his head once more above his pulpit-board, beneath which he had crouched in safety during the volley of musketry, "and I will pour forth the same gracious things without paper that have edified ye all to-night."

"A truce to this folly," vociferated Colonel Briggs. "Barricade the chapel windows, you Foxcraft and Stunner, and then let every one go forth of it. And you, sister Kezia, withdraw your noisy troop of womenkind, and lead Mrs. Althea Woodville to her chamber, or any place that you may find convenient security for her."

"Mistress Althea Woodville thanks you, Master Bartholomew Briggs, for all your

courtesies and tender considerations for her safety, and more especially for the agreeable divertissements you have provided for her entertainment this evening," said Althea, who had pretty well recovered her self-possession.

The only reply Colonel Briggs ventured was a growl, in which the words "A plague on all women's tongues, whether they be old or young," were distinguishable.

That night, Althea felt an irresistible desire to withdraw the dark curtains of her window and gaze upon the lake, which now lay in bright moonlight, flowing like an expansive sheet of silver. Her eyes instinctively turned towards the Long Holme Island, the stronghold of Philipson, from whence he issued forth with his followers from time to time, and carried on a partizan warfare against all the country gentlemen in arms against the royal cause.

The circumstance of Althea's windows being spared in the general destruction that

befell all the others was commented on by Colonel Briggs with no little asperity, nor could he by any other means account for it than on the supposition that a secret understanding existed between Philipson and some person of his household; yet even on that supposition his perplexity was great, and his suspicions passed from one to another without finding reason to fix on any individual in particular.

While he was still debating the vexatious matter, the whole of the servants, male and female, came to him in a body, demanding an instant release from his service that very day, by the lips of Master Joseph Foxcraft, the butler, who at the same time declared himself to be an exception to the general rule, adding, with a hypocritical upturning of his eyes, that he considered himself called to exercise a particular vocation at Calgarth Hall, which he should be loth to abandon.

“Which shows that you are a chosen

vessel, in which much grace doth abound," responded his master; but for these worthless knaves and women, I insist on knowing wherefore they have the insolence to propose leaving my service."

"May it please your honour——" began Stunner.

"No, villain, it does not please my honour to be left without servants," interrupted Briggs, with a tremendous look.

"But it must please your honour," interposed the shrill voice of Judy, "for we ha' aw stood many awfu' doings at Calgarth Haugh, sic as may scearse brook the naming o', wi' skulls girning upon us fra aw pearts o' t' house, by night an' by day, till our seauls were ready to flit fra body wi' verra fear, and t' baudest o' us fared good for nowt so soon as murk night closed in. But we ha' borne aw t'at, forbye we kenned right well t'at t' visitation was not to we, but to our betters. But neaw us be like to be raddled wi' leaden

shot, as tho' we were sparrows o' t' heause-top, flesh an' blood canna' stan' sic doings."

"Hold your foolish jargon, woman," replied Briggs, and learn that no harm can befall you from shot fired at such a distance. A christian and covenanted household is always under especial care, and the son of wickedness yonder shall not be permitted to hurt a hair of the heads of such as be faithful."

"For aw t'at," interrupted Barbara Braithwaite, "the vera life fared as if departing fra bones, and aw wi' pure fear lest a stray shot should pop into me and sleay outright. Sure t'at best new hood t'at hangit i' t' light closet at stair-head is drilled as fu' o' holes as a pea-sifter; and neaw I put it to measter's own conscience to say what would ha' bin t' case if t' head had bin in it."

"Why, you prating baggage," replied her master, "what is the use of asking me such silly questions? Don't you perceive that

your fate had not pre-ordained your head to be in your hood just at that time and place?"

"But new hood cost a siller creawn, an' I ha' not e'en worn it yet, forbye we be aw mewed up in geart dull Heaugh, like unto popish nuns. I'se sure I'se ha' enow o' sic dolefu' doings, and if I goes without a bodle o' wage, I'll be off to-night, please the pigs."

"Woman," said Briggs, "you will do no such thing. The drawbridge is up, the gates are made fast, and the keys are safe in my keeping, therefore no one can quit their posts without my free leave. If it be predestined that we are to stand a siege, it is not for us to gainsay it."

"Measter Philipson o' the Holme is a civil lad enow to any one t'at speaks him fair," said the housekeeper, "and if your honour's worship wad be pleased to meake up owd grudges wi' he, flesh and blood need na be perilled wi' deadly feud betwixt ye. He never was t' mon to fire a shot at Haugh, nor even to

skirl up a bugle under the wa', till you came home, and we ha' had nowt but branglement ever syn."

"Silence, old crone, and avoid the room this instant," interrupted the master.

"Let the misguided folk depart from us, brother, if they are so inclined," said Mrs. Kezia, "for what profit shall they be to us when their hearts are in the camp of the godless? I am willing, for my part, to pay the arrears due unto mine own servants, and to release them from the contract of service by which they are bound unto me till that fourth quarter of the year be expired which prelatical and papistical people vainly call Michaelmas."

"Ay, you may release yours, if it so please you, sister," returned Briggs, "but by my yea and nay, not one of my established household, whether they call you mistress or me master, shall depart these walls, under pain, whether male or female, of being

treated as deserters, and suffering military law accordingly, save and except that, as the case is a little uncommon and out of rule, I shall give such culprits the choice of whether they will like to be hanged or flung into the lake with a stone about their necks, seeing that I should esteem it matter of conscience so to do rather than ye should go forth into the encampment of the enemy."

The malcontents received this intelligence with a chorus of groans, but the undaunted Judy made reply:

"Theaw'st skulls enow girning about t' Haugh, without murdering mo', puir sackless bodies, than those whose boanes canna rest i' t' grund, for woe o' thee, master mine."

"Out of my sight, or I'll see whether I can command a dozen troopers, and not be able to reduce a few mutinously disposed Gibeonites to order and submission. Here you, Bethuliel, clear the room of this refrac-

tory crew ! and send them to their several duties !”

Bethúliel advanced towards the malcontents with a ghastly grin, to perform his master’s bidding, but was spared the trouble of expelling them by the prompt manner in which they evacuated the apartment.

CHAPTER III.

ROBERT PHILIPSON, whose near vicinity to Calgarth Hall so greatly annoyed and perplexed Colonel Briggs, was the last representative of an ancient family that once held an important rank in their native county, but their consequence had been greatly diminished since their principal estate, the manor of Calgarth Hall and its dependencies had been rent from them by the father of Colonel Briggs, by means, as it was generally said, that would not bear very close inquiry. A long series of perplexing and expensive law proceedings had been instituted by the Philipson family in the vain endeavour to regain

their inheritance, which had always been considered unalienable from the direct heir. It has been most tritely, but most truly observed, that possession is nine points of the law—the father of Colonel Briggs, in whose favour the first will had been made (and which was the only one produced or acted upon) had been brought up to the law by his father, and having more than a professional interest in his legal education, he became early a shrewd lawyer and well skilled to take advantage of every intricacy and subtlety of the courts, nor did he scruple to resort to means the very reverse of honourable, in dealing privately with witnesses, and corrupting advocates, and thus succeeded in keeping his adversary from advancing in his suit. The same line of policy had been adopted by his son, so that although the rightful title of the Philipsons to Calgarth was in reality indisputable, they never were suffered to have an opportunity of bringing their cause to a fair

trial. Thus was the residue of their property much reduced; neither Edward Philipson nor his son reaped anything but vexation and trouble from their endeavours to right themselves.

Two of their most important witnesses, the steward and his son, had been spirited away by Briggs the elder, in an early stage of the business, and these, by some of those unexpected circumstances that often occur in the romance of real life, found means, after a forty years' absence in the new settlements in North America, to return to their native land, and make their existence known to Robert Philipson, the grandson and heir to Edward Philipson, of Long Holme Island.

Colonel Briggs well knew that their evidence would overthrow the very infirm and insecure tenure by which he held his usurped estate, that of an illegal will. The fatal differences had already broken out between king and parliament, and Briggs, who

warmly espoused the cause of the latter, took the first opportunity which a preponderance of their military forces in the neighbourhood gave him, to seize, in the temporary absence of Philipson, the two witnesses, and having accused them of being spies in the country, in the employ of Sir Ralph Hopton, he caused them both to be hanged after a very summary and arbitrary military process.

The general odium that he incurred in the country by this infamous act, rendered Calgarth a very unpleasant residence to him, he therefore quitted it for two or three years, during which time he acquired the confidence of the republican leaders by the active part which he took both in the political and military operations of the day, and he was generally considered by them to be a most useful and rising man in the new order of things. Nevertheless, there were those who had opportunities of being intimately acquainted with him that were wont to say that

the irritability of his temper would always prove a bar to his advancement.

He had, it is true, been bred and thoroughly trained up in the peculiar habits of the puritans—their dress and phraseology were a sort of second nature to him, nor did he scruple at uttering on occasions, what he called necessary evasions, and convenient denials—yet it was by words alone, for he could not enact the by-play and dumb show of dissimulation—he was ill skilled in that more important part of the craft, and found it impossible either to rule his irascible temper, or conceal his feelings. His three ruling passions—love of power, love of money, and hatred to Robert Philipson—were well known to whoever knew him, for however he strove to conceal the second, it was beyond his art to hide the first and the last.

A marriage with Althea Woodville was desired by him as a means of gratifying all three. Her society amused and excited him

—for he took a peculiar pleasure in quarreling with her, because it afforded him an opportunity of giving vent to his temper, and it was continually his study to devise something that might be offensive and painful to her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE dull monotony of Calgarth Hall was at length broken by a dinner-party, consisting, however, of gentlemen only. Colonel Briggs, when at home, was accustomed to invite those who espoused the cause of the parliament to meet at Calgarth Hall on that day of the week when he expected his packet of diurnals and Mercuries from London. Many of these gentlemen lived in places where there were no posts, and yet possessed the keenest appetites for London news.

These simple-minded squires were so little aware of the science of news-craft, by which

each party retained and paid its own journalist to invent and distort public intelligence, to suit their political interests, that they devoutly received for facts all statements put forth in the diurnals of their way of thinking, for absolute truth. If the inconsistencies of any story derived from such a source were represented to them by persons better informed, or less credulous, the invariable reply would be, “I ken nowt about’n, it were printed in t’ Mercury frae Lunnon, so it canna be fause.”

Colonel Briggs’s mail was always placed, at its arrival, on his writing-table in the justice-room, the apartment where he transacted the business connected with his office as a magistrate.

Thither he and his company adjourned after dinner, to see him unfold his despatches, both public and private, and open his gazettes—operations that were looked upon with the greatest awe and curiosity by his guests, to

most of whom the arrival of a letter once in two years was regarded an event extraordinary, and the composition of one was considered a feat only fit for a conjuror or a counsellor. Colonel Briggs seldom published any portion of his letters, but on this occasion he handed the Perfect Diurnal to Squire Newbiggen, of New Place, who, as the largest landowner present, occupied the place of honour at his right hand, and requested him to open the readings, and take especial care not to let one word fall to the ground, "Latin gibberish, of course, excepted, being a Popish vanity," said the squire.

The soldiers and domestics were considerably summoned to attend this political banquet, nor were even the ladies excused, in order, as Colonel Briggs observed, "that not a single crumb of comfort should fall idly, and without its use. For," continued he, "it is my prayer that wherever these precious diurnals abound, ears may be found to hear them."

Squire Newbiggen succeeded in reading the Perfect Diurnal with great credit to himself, as he skipped very few of the hard words, and spelt none; at least, not audibly.

“By my fay, thou hast done wonders, Master Newbiggen, and hast read the diurnal specially,” cried Squire Thistlethwaite, of Crossbank, who sat nearest in the circle, and expected to be complimented with the next turn of reading.

Squire Thistlethwaite of Crossbank, was a sturdy elderly gentleman, with a remarkable thick head and neck, and stout, square body; one of those persons whom the most common observer would pronounce to be inordinately obstinate, only from a view of his person—while every feature in his bluff face told the fact that when once Squire Thistlethwaite had made up his mind to do anything, neither force, fraud, nor persuasion, could divert him from his way.

Country gossip said that he lived a bachelor

life for the sake of Mrs. Kezia Briggs, who had been cruel to him from her youth upwards, and that for love of her he visited at Calgarth, though his principles were suspected to be the very reverse of puritanical.

To this humourist did Colonel Briggs, prompted by his evil destiny, consign the next diurnal, and with a sonorous voice, and tolerably good accent, Squire Thistlethwaite proceeded very fluently to read its contents.

The news which was contained in the first page of this journal was of a character to make the assembly first stare, and then utter a variety of groans, for it appeared to be a direct contradiction to all the crowning mercies detailed with so much exultation in the Perfect Diurnal; and Master Thistlethwaite was civilly requested to pass over such melancholy buffetings in silence, which could only have found their way into the journal in consequence of some blameworthy stumbling of the diurnal-maker.

“Peradventure, he was disguised in strong drink when making up this sheet, or he would not have put forth such untoward intelligence. Prythee cast it from thee, neighbour, and betake thee to another containing more acceptable things,” said Briggs.

But Master Thistlethwaite sturdily replied, “That if the parliament had been buffeted, he saw no reason for salving their sores with lies and dissimulation, and as he had begun to read that diurnal, he should continue it to the end. Besides,” he added, “the next article is news from the Lancaster and Lake country, and sure we all crave to know what Lunnon folks ha’ heard of us.”

“Thou’rt vera reet, neighbour Thistlethwaite,” cried all the northern squires, pricking up their ears at the name of home news, “Read up, read up!” and he read as follows:

“‘Intelligence hath just reached us (by way, not of private letters, but by public outcry,

spreading from village to village, and from town to town) of a barbarous deed lately committed in the northern part of Lancashire. The widow of a certain cavalier baronet died lately, leaving an only daughter, heiress of vast possessions, to the guardianship of a colonel in the service of parliament, who, after preaching a sermon at the defunct lady's funeral, set off with the fair young gentlewoman to his seat, not a hundred miles from Windermere. At Hest Bank he was encountered by Major Philipson, and a party of cavaliers, who offered him fair place and time of battle, but he refused to fight, and sheltered himself behind the young lady's mantua, which proved in this instance a more potent defence than the sevenfold shield of Ajax.' ”

“In the name of Beelzebub, what is this about?” cried Briggs, interrupting the reader.

“Thou'lt know when I have read to the end, for here is a mort more on't. Hold—

hold! where did us leave off? Ah, here it be, at the shield of Ajax.

“ ‘When the said colonel had by this martial device baffled his foes, he fled o’er sands, carrying with him his fair young ward, and without pity, guided her coach into a quicksand, where he left her to drown, while he provided for his own safety; this colonel (every cur is a colonel nowadays) is hight Bartholomew, or Barabbas Briggs; we are not certain of the christian name.’ ”

At this climax Althea exhibited marks of astonishment as great as those of her guardian, though she was by no means agitated with the anger that transported him into a paroxysm of execrations, which greatly scandalized his pious sister.

“Verily,” said Mrs. Kezia, “thou art blameworthy, brother Bartholomew, in thy wrathful pouring forth of sinful words. It is plain that we have been buffeted by the buffetings of an Oxford Mercurius, which

some scoffing malignant hath thrust privily into the mail. Yet I would have thee listen patiently to its revilings—reviling not again—to the end, that in this gathering together of thy friends and neighbours, thou may'st have the better opportunity of contradicting aught which the man of Belial doth witness falsely against thee.”

The visitors were eager for Squire Thistlethwaite to proceed, as they took a truly neighbourly delight in listening to a piece of local scandal at any time ; and this they received with peculiar zest, because Briggs was an object of envy to some and of dislike to all from his overbearing manners and the airs of superiority he was wont to display among them at all times and in all places.

““It seems that this Barabbas Briggs is a fellow of a very evil countenance and worse conscience, who hath managed to accomplish himself, in the course of forty-seven years, with the morals of a fox and the manners

of a bear, and withal, to keep fast possession of another man's estate. Calgarth Hall is fearfully haunted with a pair of skulls which no power can keep under ground, for they appear in all parts of the house, and at all times and seasons, as witnesses of his evil deeds.' ”

“ All lies—as false as Lucifer ! ” interrupted Briggs, as the guests looked from one to another, and the pale, affrighted servants drew closer to the table for protection, casting sidelong glances behind them. “ I protest,” continued he, “ that I will enforce this evil-minded diurnal-maker to eat the journal that sets forth his shameless falsitudes, for I can, with a safe conscience, swear by my yea and nay that although a vision of skulls hath occasionally been seen in my house, yet it is a mere besetting of Satan, permitted in consequence of the gluttonies and backslidings of my household ; but for myself, no such things do affect me in any-

wise ; and if ever I hanged any one out of due course of law, let them show signs of it at this present moment if they can."

At this instant there was a rustling motion heard among a heap of papers on a side-table, and two skulls appeared, as if in answer to the invitation. The room was cleared instantly. Guests and servants rushed out promiscuously, and the former calling "To horse!" departed as if for their lives, without staying to bid farewell to their host.

Mrs. Kezia Briggs, firmly believing the whole appearance to be some juggle or optical deception, was the only person who did not evince terror. She advanced to the table and boldly seizing one of the skulls with the fire-tongs, found it of tangible materials enough, and called to Joseph Foxcraft, the butler, who did not seem so much dismayed as his fellow-servants, to secure the other and do as she did. She flung the one she had captured on a huge wood-fire that was

blazing in the chimney. No sooner had Foxcraft obeyed his mistress, and consigned the other to the flames, than the skulls flew up the chimney with a horrible explosion, scattering blazing embers and hot peat in every direction, announcing their upward progress by showers of brickbats and other fragments of the building which were precipitated down the wide chimney on the hearth and even into the middle of the room, while the whole apartment was pervaded with a dense smoke and a most suffocating smell of sulphur.

CHAPTER V.

THE opinion that Mrs. Kezia so strongly held of there being some trick and knavery connected with the apparition, was more strongly than ever confirmed by this circumstance; but the effect which it produced on the mind of every one else was to increase their alarm and superstitious terrors in a ten-fold degree.

From this hour the visitations of the skulls were more frequent than ever; they were to be seen at all times and in all places—upstairs and down-stairs. It was to no purpose that Mrs. Kezia Briggs buried them in the

earth or flung them into the lake with her own hands; at her return to the house she was sure to be greeted by them on the very threshold, till at last their pertinacity conquered hers, and she fairly left her brother to fight his own battles with his ghostly enemies. When she no longer troubled herself with them, they confined their visits chiefly to Colonel Briggs, and him they haunted almost incessantly. It was no unusual circumstance for him to find them reposing on his pillow when he retired to rest. All attempts at getting rid of them were fruitless; they only grinned at the exorcisms of pious Master Nobbs, and fairly set at nought all that was said to them by the most celebrated of the wandering preachers who occasionally called at Calgarth Hall.

Nor was the pertinacious visitings of the skulls the only annoyance to which Colonel Briggs was subjected. Tricks were constantly

played him with regard to his diurnals, which were always, by some unaccountable means, exchanged for those from the Oxford press. So that unless he took the trouble of going himself to Ulverstone, escorted by a strong party (for the active and daring manner in which Philipson and his recruits scoured the country made it exceedingly dangerous to ride singly), he never could obtain a sight of any parliamentary journal, or have the satisfaction of reading either a *Mercurius* or a diurnal of his own way of thinking. For whatever precautions he might take in changing the lock of his mail, yet its contents were always the very reverse from those he expected to see, and the journals of Sir John Birkenhead, and Sir Roger Le Strange, were the only ones that were ever permitted to reach Calgarth.

Like pirates, they made their approaches by sailing under false colours, each paper being headed "*Mercurius Britannicus*," "*Scotch*

Dove," or "Perfect Diurnal;" yet their contents were from the pens of Sir John Birkenhead, Sir Roger Le Strange, and other wits of the royal party.

The more alarming annoyance of the apparitions of skulls* still continued to haunt Calgarth Hall from time to time.

* The frequent appearance of skulls at Old Calgarth Hall, during the contest of the rival kinsmen, Colonel Briggs and the Philipsons, for its possession, is still among the traditions of that mansion, and even recorded in the local history of Windermere; but how the imposition was effected has never been thoroughly explained.

CHAPTER VI.

SOLITUDE is the great fosterer of feelings such as were now gaining strength in Althea's bosom ; and while she enjoyed the opportunity of watching from the window of her apartment a certain light skiff with a green pennon shooting over the bosom of Windermere, she did not regret the gaieties of Oxford or Whitehall.

Public affairs, however, assumed daily a more serious aspect. The distracted state of the realm extended to this remote district. Lord Molyneux and Sir George Middleton, with other of the leading cavaliers of the north, on the 21st of May, made a formidable

demonstration for the king, by crossing sands at the head of one thousand men, and occupying the Furness district.

Philipson left his island in Windermere to co-operate in the loyal movement, and Colonel Briggs obeyed the summons of Colonel Rigby, the roundhead, by hastening with his garrison to resist the progress of the cavaliers, but in vain, for they got the victory, and plundered all in the neighbourhood within their reach who ventured to oppose them.

At the end of three days Philipson returned in triumph to the Long Holme and was meditating a serious attack on Calgarth Hall, but was deterred by the arrival of Colonel Briggs with a reinforcement to his garrison. Both parties lay inactive for about a week. At the end of that time each received and obeyed a hasty summons to join the muster of their respective commanders in Yorkshire.

Althea was thus left under the charge of Mrs. Kezia Briggs at Calgarth Hall, which

she now found a peaceful and pleasant abode. The skulls were never visible after the departure of Colonel Briggs; nor did anything happen to affright or disquiet her during the four months of spring and early summer which she spent there in his absence. Mrs. Kezia Briggs, being relieved of the terror of Philipson's vicinity, took her to see all the scenes of beauty and interest within a circuit of five miles, and strove, by every means in her power, to amuse and cheer her. Under the wise government of Mrs. Kezia, the house and its inhabitants had ceased to wear the air of constraint and gloom that had been, in the first instance, so depressing to the youthful spirits of Althea, who was even induced to accompany her kind relative night and morning to the domestic acts of worship in the family chapel, to the unspeakable delight of Elkanah Nobbs. She had learned to appreciate the good qualities in this person that won Mrs. Kezia's esteem for him. He was

good-natured, simple-minded, and truthful ; and under a very unprepossessing and uncouth exterior was a sincere christian. Althea ceased to treat him with satirical scorn, and would occasionally listen to his learned observations on Jewish history with some degree of interest. In return for this condescension, he was willing to do anything to serve and please her, even to shortening his sermons from an hour and a half in duration to three-quarters of an hour, as his patron was not at home to chide him for his backslidings.

The beautiful summer wore away. Althea heard that the royal cause was in the ascendant. Prince Rupert had won several important victories. Lord Wilmot had routed and dispersed Waller's forces at Roundwaydown, and the Earl of Newcastle had defeated Fairfax on Atherton Moor in Yorkshire. Philipson had greatly distinguished himself by a brilliant charge in that action, it was reported ; but she heard not from him, and watched for the green pennon in vain. On

Sunday, the 1st of October, some of the congregation attending the chapel told Master Nobbs, after sermon and prayers were over, that all Furness was in commotion, for Colonel Huddleston and young Pennington of Muncaster had formed a junction at Dalton and raised the king's banner—that they had got fifteen hundred men and a large assembly of clubmen—that Major Philipson was with them aiding and abetting their cause, but that Colonel Rigby had marched to Ulverston with seven or eight companies of foot and several companies of horse—that he was strengthened by Colonel Briggs and other parliamentary gentlemen; and it was expected that hard fighting would take place.

Althea was greatly agitated by this intelligence. She spent the rest of the day in solitary wandering in the park and gardens, and gazing over the lake towards the Long Holme. She scarcely tasted supper, and declined the pressing invitation of Elkanah Nobbs to accompany Mrs. Kezia Briggs to

the chapel, observing "that she should prefer a ramble by the lake with a book."

"Promise me not to go beyond the park, cousin Althea," said Mrs. Kezia Briggs.

"Trust me, I will not," replied Althea, giving her hand to Mrs. Kezia, who replied :

"I know you will not deceive me ; you never do ; remember it is the Lord's day ;" and so they parted.

Althea strolled by the Troutbeck, and watched the sun sinking in crimson and gold behind the Furness Fells, but her thoughts were far away. Her reverie was suddenly broken by the appearance of a singularly dressed female who advanced from a clump of trees and, stepping on an antique bridge that crossed the little dashing stream, stood before her.

Althea's cheek involuntarily blanched on perceiving it was the same person who had encountered her and Philipson at Humphrey Head and warned him not to proceed to

Wraysholme Tower, and whom Philipson had addressed by the name of Merab.

Her age might be about six-and-twenty ; her features were high and commanding ; her smile pleasant, disclosing an unbroken row of teeth of pearly whiteness. She was arrayed in a short full petticoat of dark blue camlet and black laced boddice, over which fell a cloak of scarlet cloth ; a red handkerchief was carelessly rolled and wreathed round her head in the fashion of a turban, from which her long black hair descended in spiral ringlets on her shoulders. She was shod with sandals, and her dark, but symmetrically formed, arms and legs were bare. She fixed her large, penetrating eyes on Althea's face and said :

“I read the planets and can tell you all that hath befallen you from the day of your birth. You have a proud heart, and have frowned on many a noble wooer—knights and lords they were ; but now your thoughts are on one who is neither, but who loves you well.”

“All idle guess-work,” said Althea, turning away.

“Guess-work?” repeated Merab. “They would be keen guessers, lady, who could tell you why you have been wandering here alone for the last two hours, watching for the green pennon.”

“What green pennon do you mean?” asked Althea.

“That for which you have so oft looked in vain for these four months, while it has been bravely borne in red battle,” replied Merab.

“And — and he — is he safe?” asked Althea.”

“I marvel me that the cavalier’s daughter asked not which way went the fight on Swartmoor; was the victory with the king’s true gentlemen, or with the soldiers of the parliament? but such is woman’s heart.”

“Then a battle has been fought?”

“Ay, and lost, on the side for which you pray; but you’ll ne’er think the worse of

him, so that he hath 'scaped the slaughter and comes to breathe the same air with you."

"You are well fitted for your trade; for your keen powers of observation can aptly probe the weakness of our sex."

"Say not of our sex, lady; but call to mind those by whom William Lilly, Costello, and Rice Evans are consulted, both by the champions of the king and his foes. Yea, hath not royalty itself demanded of those false pretenders an insight into the veiled pages of the future, and been contented to receive answers couched in such quibbling terms as should make the augury seem sooth which ever way went the event."

"But," returned Althea, "Lilly, Costello, and Evans boast their art in terms as lofty as you have extolled yours."

"Far be it from me to doubt their powers of boasting, whatever may be my opinion of their boasted power," observed Merab. "What, though I have never visited your great

capital, nor pored over faded parchments till I had made my lips familiar with the jargon of Nostradamus, Cornelius Agrippa, and Tycho the Dane; yet the spirit of divination is with me, and events which the learned astro-physicians dimly perceive through their laborious maze of planetary schemes and occult calculations, rush unbidden on my soul. Woe is me that such a fearful burden as foreknowledge should have been laid on me," continued she, spreading her arms abroad, and raising her large dark eyes, which assumed a glassy fixture, while her cheek faded to ashy paleness, and her lips moved silently as if in communication with some unseen object.

The evening breeze from the lake suddenly rose, agitated her garments, and raised the long jetty ringlets that floated on her shoulders, giving an increased wildness to her appearance. Althea felt a sensation allied to supernatural awe steal over her as she gazed on this mysterious being.

“Give me your hand, lady,” said Merab, “and I will tell you somewhat that will startle you, for there is sympathy between us two.”

A strange thrill crept through Althea’s veins at the touch of the sybil; she struggled and withdrew her hand.

“I see, I see it all!” cried Merab. “Guess-work, saidst thou, lady? I would it were no more. Think of me when the man you love best woos you to wed. Think of me when you kneel at the feet of him you hate. Think of me when you sit in loneliness by the dead that is now living.”

“Hold!” cried Althea, “I will hear no more dark predictions; but give me now some positive token that you have read the secret emotions of my heart.”

Merab drew from beneath her cloak a cylindrical mirror, fashioned like a simple tube for placing flowers in water, and presented it before Althea: “look on this, lady,” said she, “and tell me what you see.”

“My own features,” replied Althea, “as in a common mirror.”

“Examine it well; nay, look within, for it is hollow, and see that no deception lurks about it,” rejoined Merab.

“I see plainly that it is a toy made of looking-glass, fit to hold flowers on a lady’s table or her toilette,” cried Althea, impatiently.

“Look once again at it where it now stands,” said Merab, placing it on the parapet of the bridge, and slipping, unobserved by Althea, a square tablet of wood coarsely painted with incongruous and fantastic daubs of colour before it.

Althea uttered a suppressed cry of astonishment, for the likeness of Major Philipson rose before her in the mirror.

“Is not this a life-like resemblance of the beloved one?” asked Merab.

“How came it there?” demanded Althea, snatching the mirror and gazing eagerly upon

it; but her own lineaments alone met her disappointed eyes. She turned away with a deep sigh.

“Thou wouldst see him again, I trow,” observed Merab, “but it is too late; and now let me ask you if William Lilly gave you so pleasant a sight in return for the five broad pieces he received to read your destiny? though he told you you should wed a young and handsome cavalier, with blue eyes and chestnut lovelocks, before you had completed your one-and-twentieth year.”

“They were his very words,” said Althea, in surprise.

“He deceived you, ladybird,” returned the sybil: “you will not marry in your minority, unless with Colonel Briggs, or with his consent.”

“I will be shrouded, coffined, and buried seven feet deep in Bowness churchyard rather,” exclaimed Althea, vehemently.

“Beautiful Althea, marry me to-morrow,

if it be only to avert so evil a destiny, and outwit the devil and his allies," exclaimed a gay voice behind her. Althea, turning about with a cry of surprise, recognised the veritable man whose mysterious likeness she had just been contemplating in Merab's glass. Overcome with confusion she started violently, staggered, and might have fallen to the ground, had not Philipson caught her in his arms. He pressed her to his bosom, and imprinted an unauthorized kiss on her trembling lips at the same time.

"Major Philipson, this is ill done of you," exclaimed Althea, as soon as she recovered her voice.

"How ill done, my life, my joy?" cried he, audaciously repeating the offence: "this, I hope, is better."

"Leave me, sir, if you cannot treat me with the respect that is my due," said Althea, indignantly extricating herself from his embrace.

"Philipson threw himself at her feet.

“Pardon,” he said, “but my rapture at seeing you once more overcame my reason. Nay, turn not thus away to conceal your fruitless attempts to conjure up a frown on that fair face; unless, indeed you disdain to bestow a smile on a soldier who has just returned from a lost battle.”

“A lost battle!” exclaimed Althea, anxiously.

“A skirmish, perhaps, I should rather call it, which took place on Lindale Close this morning between the rebel Rigby’s regular troops and the raw Cumberland muster which Pennington of Muncaster and Colonel Huddleston had led into Furness to fight for King Charles. I and some of our loyal Lakers joined them at Dalton, where we slept last night. Bat Briggs and his solemn crew met the other roundheads at yon grey town of Ulverstone, o’er sands. They had prayers and psalm-singing on Swartmoor at daybreak, and we came to the tussle at Lindale. They got the better of us after an hour’s hard fight-

ing, and we had to scamper off, which irked me not a little ; but it was the fortune of war, and I live in hope of better luck next time we have a brush : and now, my charming cousin, listen. You love me, I know you do, and are wretched in my absence.”

“ Who told you so, audacious man ? ” exclaimed Althea. “ It was you who sent the witch woman to beguile me ; I know it was. Yea, I’ll tax her with it. Ha ! she is gone ; but whither ? ”

“ No matter,” replied Philipson : “ time is precious. I cannot live without you, my Althea. My swift little shallop is snugly moored hard by, and a few strokes of the oar will land you on a fairy isle where you shall reign as queen, if you will deign to become the bride of a poor but faithful cavalier.”

“ It cannot be,” answered Althea, with a sigh.

“ But I say it can be, it ought to be, and it

shall be ; an' you forbid it not," cried Philipson impetuously.

"You are not aware of the last will of my dying mother?" said Althea.

"Yes—yes ; I have heard it was her wish that you should marry Bartholomew Briggs ; but surely, Althea, you are not dreaming of rendering obedience to so unreasonable a desire. Suppose my mother had enjoined me to wed Mistress Kezia, which would have been about as suitable an alliance, or not to marry without her consent, which is much the same thing, do you suppose that I should consider myself bound to pay the slightest regard to such an insane whim?"

Spite of herself Althea could not forbear laughing at the ridiculous circumstances Philipson had imagined as a parallel situation to her own.

"I fancy," she said, "in such case you would have experienced no little difficulty in prevailing on Mrs. Kezia Briggs to accept

your hand, even if you had been dutifully disposed; and then her refusal would have afforded you a handsome excuse."

"Rashly supposed," lovely Althea, returned Philipson, gaily. "I should be very sorry to be placed at the disposal and depend on the refusal of any ancient spinster in the north, especially if she were a puritan."

"Out upon you, audacious one," cried Althea; "maidens of any age are not so easily won as you vainly imagine; and least of all our worthy kinswoman, Mrs. Kezia Briggs, of whom I forbid you to speak with unbecoming levity in my presence."

"Nay," said Philipson, "I have no such intention, as I entertain a very considerable respect for her character myself: certes, I would not impugn her taste so far as to suppose her insensible to the merits of a dashing cavalier like Robert Philipson, especially at her time of day, when so rare a chance might not fall to her lot again. Well,

my divine Althea, I am losing the inestimable present time in prating of our puritan kindred. The moments are too precious to be thus wasted. Speak but the word, and I am thine eternally, despite of Bat Briggs or the oracles you have just been consulting of that enemy of souls, whom I will not offend your delicate ears with naming by his own ugly name. Albeit I am little of a euphuist, and it is one of my failings to use plain and downright terms."

"Major Philipson," replied Althea, "whatever be the state of my own feelings on the subject, my duty to my deceased mother obliges me to remain at Calgarth Hall until the period of my minority be expired. At present I have not even an excuse to my own conscience for quitting it; and I have pledged my word to Mrs. Kezia Briggs not to go."

"But your persecutor will return, Althea; nay, my scouts report falsely if he is not now returning. Trust me, the present calm is

but the forerunner of a tempest. There is no security for you but flight, unless indeed you do not, in reality, contemplate the idea of becoming his wife with the horror it ought to raise in your mind."

"Mention not the possibility of aught so abhorrent," exclaimed Althea, shuddering.

"No, my beloved; I will rather urge you to the alternative of accepting your devoted Philipson."

"You are a bold wooer," said Althea; "but matrimony is a conclusion at which we cannot arrive so hastily as you suppose."

"It shall not be my fault if we do not," replied Philipson, endeavouring to draw her with gentle violence towards the boat.

"Wherefore this most unkind resistance, my adored Althea?" continued he; "it is not from a tender parent or a faithful brother that I would tear you; but I would save you, even at the risk of incurring your displeasure, from lasting misery, from an enforced union

with a man who is, who must be, abhorrent to you, and who has already dared to commit a series of outrages against you."

"Talk not of outrages, sir!" cried Althea, struggling angrily with him; "for the present is one of the most inexcusable I ever met with. I insist on your releasing me this instant, and permitting me to return to Calgarth Hall without further delay.

"To Calgarth Hall! never, believe me," replied Philipson, firmly. "I should indeed deserve to lose you if I did that."

"Major Philipson," she said, "I will not be compelled to do what my reason so totally disapproves. Leave me now, and trust we shall meet again in a happier time."

"Never, never! if we do not avail ourselves of the present," cried Philipson vehemently.

The conference was here interrupted by the hasty approach of Milly, who exclaimed in great consternation, "Oh! madam, ma-

dam ! Colonel Briggs has just arrived with a fresh gang of roundheads from winning a great victory, they say. He is in a topping fury with his sister for permitting your absence, and has driven out the whole household in search of you. He will be here himself in another minute ; only I ran hard to get the start of him, that he might not catch you and Major Philipson together.”

“Then the word must be ‘away’ without further ceremony or leave-asking,” cried Philipson, taking Althea round the waist and swinging her into the boat. Milly hastily followed and seated herself by her lady.

A few strokes of the oar, manfully given by the powerful and skilful arm of Wat Sorby, who had been waiting in the boat for the last half-hour, soon put them at a considerable distance from Calgarth shore.

In silence they glided forward, for no one spoke, not even the offended prize, whom Philipson could scarcely yet believe his own.

CHAPTER VII.

THE name of Mistress Althea Woodville was long and loudly reiterated in the gardens at Calgarth through the stillness of the evening air, and every time it was repeated its owner felt herself more closely clasped, as if in triumphant gratulation, by the arm of her abductor. She tried to fling it off, in her displeasure, but in vain. The moon had risen above the Furness Fells in a cloudless sky, and was gilding with her glorious radiance the broad expanse of unruffled waters, over which the light shallop was gliding towards the picturesque archipelago of isles on the bosom of Windermere.

The freshness of the air, the laving sound of the oars, and the intense beauty of the scene recalled the perturbed spirits of Althea, and she gave utterance to her feelings in a torrent of angry reproaches ; but these were interrupted by Wat Sorby's exclamation :

“ By'r Lady of the Holme, they have launched three boats, manned with trooping roundheads, and are swashing after us. We have the start of them, it is true,” continued Sorby ; “ nevertheless, they may get near enough to play us off a volley, if you do not quit the helm, major, and bear a hand with the other pair of oars.”

“ I don't believe that they have got aught more than petronels and broadswords with them, Wat,” cried Philipson, standing up in the boat, and taking an observation of the pursuers ; but they have great strength of oars. I know not whether I may presume to ask my divine Althea to steer our little

bark?" continued he, in a voice of the most insinuating softness.

"Is there indeed a point at which your presumption falters?" returned the offended beauty, casting a glance of infinite disdain at him from beneath her long dark eyelashes.

"Very few, I fancy," replied the cavalier, being ever an observer of the proverb "that faint heart never won fair lady."

"She is not yet won," audacious man, retorted Althea.

"By the mass, major, the roundheads are gaining upon us!" interrupted Wat Sorby. "You will have leisure enough to convince the lady when you have once brought her safely to shore; till then, I would (if I might be so bold) advise you to look to the oars, and as for the helm—why, here's Mistress Milly will steer with a blythe good-will. Won't you, my bonny bird?"

"Ay, truly will I, Master Sorby," replied Milly, seating herself at the rudder. I have

often steered my father's wherry on the Thames, and I trow that I can manage the helm passing well."

"Impelled by the energetic aid of Philipson, the boat darted impetuously forward, and made such rapid way before her pursuers, that in a few minutes they shot under the guarded arch of the gothic boat-house, where Philipson, springing to shore, placed his lovely prize on terra-firma, and bending his knee before her, he greeted her with—

"Welcome to your new sovereignty, my fair queen of the isles of Windermere, and deign to accept the fealty which the chief of your subjects here offers you, and be pleased to extend your gracious pardon to him for all offences."

Althea turned away with a look of unabated anger; but her most serious manifestations of displeasure could not damp the wild exultation with which Philipson congratulated himself on having rescued her from the power of his

rival, and landed her in safety on his own territories, as he called the Long Holme and its little dependent isles. But his ecstasies were cut short by Sorby, who pointed out to him the probability of his enemies, strong in numbers and flushed with recent victory, making a descent on the island.

“ Right, Walter, the thing is not unlikely, and we must make in a hurry the necessary preparations for giving cousin Bat a warm reception,” returned Philipson ; “ nevertheless, the safety and convenience of this lady must first be cared for by me. Meantime look to the priming of the pieces, and summon every one to the defence of the coast.”

He then led Althea, who preserved an indignant silence, through the moonlit groves of limes and majestic oaks, by several winding and embowered paths, to a velvet lawn in the centre of the lovely isle, where an antique but pleasant Gothic house was situated, flanked with four strong towers. From several aper-

tures in these projected small pieces of artillery, called in those days chamber-pieces. Turf ramparts had been recently thrown up round and about the mansion, on which were planted several cannon of different sizes.

Philipson evidently surveyed these warlike defences with no slight degree of satisfaction. And pointing them out to his silent companion, he said :

“ You see, my adored Althea, I am well prepared for a siege, and have not lightly taken what I cannot stoutly hold. But enter the Holme House, my queen, and partake of such humble entertainment as my bachelor housekeeping can afford.”

He then, without noticing her grave displeasure, gaily conducted her into the house, saying as he did so :

“ My household cares will sit lightly upon me when I have a lady bright to take the supreme command of me and mine. Since the death of my much-honoured mother, I

have had no one to grace the head of my table, to look to pasties and confections, and see whether linen be fairly smoothed and laid up in lavender. How now, my lovely cousin, art trying not to laugh at my distresses?"

"Rather trying not to weep, you mean, at the unworthy manner in which you have abused my confidence, and made me your prisoner," returned Althea.

Without noticing this ungracious response, Philipson ushered her into a pleasant circular parlour, where an aged female was seated, engaged in perusing a huge vellum book, by the light of a lamp through spectacles, illuminated with pictured saints and martyrs.

"Gramercy, nurse Mabel," said he, "I have brought you a fair guest to-night, you see, and I must leave her to your kindly tendance for the present. See that she hath the best sleeping apartment, with well-aired beds for her and her maid, in the same chamber if so she listeth, and provide all

needful and proper refreshments for both, and in all respects treat this lady reverently, as you value my approbation.

A shot was now fired from the beach.

“ Ha, ha ! is it so ? ” exclaimed Philipson ;
“ then a brief good-night to thee, love ! for I must away, and who knows, Althea, what may be a soldier’s lot ? ”

The flush of anger on Althea’s cheek was displaced by the paleness of alarm which his last words had inspired. She thought she had been unnecessarily harsh to him ; and perhaps in the returning tide of tenderness with which her heart overflowed at the idea of his danger she might have granted her forgiveness ; but the shot was repeated, and he was gone without a single farewell word from her, and it was possible that the next time she saw him he might be extended on a bloody bier, the peril of which he had lightly encountered for love of her.

She sank into a chair, and, leaning her

crossed arms upon the table, buried her face upon them in uncontrolled agitation, regardless of the hospitable attentions of nurse Mabel, and of her oft-repeated entreaties to partake of the refreshments she had provided.

At length a general discharge of fire-arms resounded from the beach. Althea started from her seat, and clasped her hands in terror. The volley was instantly returned, and a thousand echoes reverberated the sound from isle to isle and from shore to shore.

“Our Lady of the Holme, preserve us!” cried Mabel, apostrophizing the patroness of Windermere.

Althea, pale and trembling, hurried from one to another of the windows with which the room was lighted, but the thick embowering screen of woods completely shut out all view of the conflict; yet the dim twilight that now pervaded the apartment was ever and anon dispelled by the lightning-like flashes which heralded the report of every volley of firearms.

“ Our Lady of the Holme, be good unto us, and save and defend the master ! But he was aye sic a parlous bairn, even before I ceased to dandle him on these owd knees. Bless the heart o’ him ! ’tis a gallant lad, and the fawse carles at Calgarth aye shake wi’ fear when my bonny boy Robin gi’es the charge upon them. Only blithe wad I be if there was no sic awfu’ doings atwixt him and that dour carle Black Briggs o’ the owd Haugh, his evil kinsman.”

Thus prated nurse Mabel of her foster-son, in the pride and fondness of her heart ; but Althea could take heed of nothing but the incessant roar of the musketry, and the shouts from the beach. After twenty minutes or half an hour spent in this breathless state of suspense, the firing grew fainter, and at length died away altogether. A short pause ensued, which was interrupted by a general shout of triumph, that was prolonged by all the echoes of the island, and they were answered in

various cadences by the echoes from the opposite fells.

Althea's breath grew shorter, and her heart throbbed almost audibly with hope as well as fear.

"Now God in his mercy preserve us, and grant that the victory may have been gotten by my precious bairn! Listen, lady," continued old Mabel, unclosing one of the Gothic casements; "I think that sounds like Wat Sorby's shout."

The moon slept as peacefully on the motionless trees and dewy lawn, as if her beams had not recently looked down on a scene of hot conflict.

Presently a busy and confused sound of approaching feet was heard; anon loud laughter and joyous voices, speaking altogether, were distinguishable.

"That's Wat Sorby's laugh, by faith and troth!" cried Mabel, after listening anxiously through the window; "and ye may guess

right soothly that my gallant bairn is safe, and has gotten the mastery, or ye would ne'er hear Sorby's merry laugh."

"Yes, yes, he is there," answered Althea, as the noble figure of Philipson emerged from the dark shadows of the wood at the head of his party, with whom he was talking loudly and cheerfully.

"Heaven be praised that he is safe, life and limb!" cried Mabel. "Now I'll go bestir myself among the maidens to set forth a dainty supper for him an' his merry men a'."

The next moment Philipson entered the room with flashing eyes and heightened colour, singing from the song of the Marquis of Montrose, 'Tell me how to woo thee, love!' then cried, 'Victoria!' is the word, my beautiful Althea. We have driven cousin Bat and his puritans into the lake again, with doublets marvellously well peppered; and I think he will be hardly affectioned towards another

visit in a hurry, after the reception we have given him."

"Are there any lives lost, Major Philipson?" asked Althea, in a serious tone, suppressing with difficulty the joy she felt at her heart from being perceptible.

"None on our side, my fair cousin, and a few flesh-wounds and broken heads are, I believe all the damage sustained by the other. To-morrow all who feel so inclined may pay their compliments to the ashen grove by the lake edge, and ask if any of my young trees are mortally wounded, for Bat's shot pelted among them rarely, but hurt not us, whatever execution it might do among the hamadryads."

"You can talk with reckless levity of encounters like these?" observed Althea, reproachfully.

"Else I should make but a sorry soldier, Althea. But how is this? Have you no smiles, no word of welcome for me, cruel one?"

“You could value my smiles but little, or you would not wilfully have forfeited them by your late conduct.”

“Have you the heart, my lovely coz, to preserve an angry tone when I have been fighting so stoutly for your sweet sake? If so, I shall retire, and commend you to the care of Mabel, admonishing you, withal, not to sleep upon your wrath, since that were sin, my love. So balmy sleep and pleasing dreams attend you!”

He then withdrew, and Mabel soon after appeared, followed by Milly, and bearing a pair of wax-lights in silver stands, with which she lighted Althea and her maid into a cheerful chamber, furnished both with elegance and costliness; but, more than these, there was an air of comfort and neatness pervading every arrangement, that did great honour to nurse Mabel's superintendence, and formed no slight contrast with the oppressive gloom of Althea's apartment at Calgarth Hall.

The lightly canopied alcove bed was furnished with draperies and hangings of the finest and most snowy damask linen that the looms of Holland could produce, lined with slight rose-coloured taffeta. The toilet-table was covered with white lawn, trimmed with furbelows of the same elegant tint and material with which the bed was lined. The framework of the tall looking-glass that stood on the toilet was wrought in natural flowers with an infinity of small Dutch beads. The cunning craft of the Dutch or German artificer of the said frame was, however, partly concealed by the folds of rose-coloured tiffany, in which the toilet-glass was draped.

Before the glass was arranged a little army of Indian boxes and painted glass bottles, with silver necks and stoppers; these bottles were filled with aromatic waters, distilled by dame Mabel from the fragrant lavender that grew in the gardens round Long Holme House, and from rosemary blossoms, so famed by Elizabeth

Queen of Hungary as the grand restorative of health and beauty, by means of which she captivated at the age o' seventy the heart of her neighbour the king of Poland, who was young enough to be her son. Tradition likewise testifieth that the holy Elizabeth declined the matrimonial overtures of her youthful wooer, which shows her to have been a woman of wisdom and conscientiousness as well as a saint. The ladies will doubtless excuse this digression, it being on an important subject, and will provide themselves with bottles of genuine Hungary water forthwith, although now out of fashion. Only let them take heed that the rosemary blossoms be gathered when the dew is off them, and at the very hour when Venus and the moon are in conjunction.

But we have deserted dame Mabel's arrangements in honour of her guest; let us take another Asmodean peep at the rest of Althea's toilet. There were besides distillations from lavender and royal rosemary, many

essences not less reviving, drawn from odorous mountain herbs, collected at their several seasons and proper planetary hours by the experienced Mabel, and enforced to yield their sweets to her still ; nor must we forget that her rose-water, drawn in Balnea Marie from the beautiful semi-double old English rose that adorns the gardens of ancient mansions with its rich dark crimson blossoms, freckled and marbled with purple velvet marks, was not inferior to the delicious essences of Persia or China.

There was on the toilet a dressing-box, covered with rose-coloured satin, richly embroidered with flowers and curious patterns in bullion, the work of the lady Aveline Philipson, the Major's grandmother, whose waiting gentlewoman Mabel had been in times of old ; the said box, containing a marvellous variety of public drawers for the reception of all the manifold minutiae requisite for a lady's toilet, and secret repositories, curiously contrived for the security of jewels or money,

or yet more precious billet-doux. Then there were pincushions covered with the most daintily-embroidered taffetas, fringed with gold, and pincushions with frilled covers of the fairest lawn, studded in patterns of pins, most ingeniously arranged.

Besides the large brilliant dressing-glass, there was the hand-glass, set in ivory, inlaid, both frame and handle, with silver and mother-of-pearl. All these relics of an ancient house had been so carefully preserved by nurse Mabel, as to have retained their original gloss and freshness, and were now set forth by her to the best advantage, in her zealous desire of doing honour to her young master. There was not a little of proud humility in the apology which she offered to Althea for the poorness of her accommodation; glancing at the same time on the garniture of the toilet, with an eye of extreme satisfaction, and making a low curtsy that might justly be termed a reverence.

“It was long,” she said, “syn’ ladies had slept at the Holme House, albeit it was the jointure house for the widow ladies of the Philipson family, when the young squire, or may be, as was more commonly the case, the young knight (in those good old times when knighthood was honourable) took possession of the great owd Haugh at Calgarth, the ancient family seat, on the death of the squire or knight, his father—Our Lady of the Holme rest his soul, and hold him free from purgatory! But times have altered with the Philipson folk for the three last descents. Woe worth the day that ever saw a fawse Briggs mingle his base blood with the noble stream of the Philipsons, or rather that saw a female Philipson stoop to alliance with a Briggs. But I crave your pardon, fair madam, for now I recall to mind that Mistress Alice Philipson was your grandmother, an’ you be the daughter of my Lady Woodville, Mistress Miriam Briggs that was.

Ah, well-a-day, I remember her in her teens, a fine young creature she was, no wise of a Briggs to look upon, yet a true kin to them in her melancholic precision, even when a child. She was aye bitter agen her catholic cousins, the Philipsons, whom she used to call blinded idolaters ; and when other ladies of her age and station went to shire balls, and joined in the merry-makings, at Yule and May-day, she would sit at home reading heretical sermons and sour controversies, in the true spirit of her brother and nephew. Well, however she won the heart of the gay gallant baron-knight, as they called your father, is unbeknown to every one, but I guess it was her beauty did it. Marriages are made in heaven, they say, and go by destiny, and so it was with the marriage of Mistress Alice Philipson, I suppose. Owd Sir Percy Philipson, our major's grandfather, for a' he was so bitter agen his sister's mismatch, became so besotted with her son, arter

he had wormed himself into his favour, that he cherished him to the wrong of his own son, and left him his money, and most of his lands, when he thought his son Edward would have no heir ; but when owd Sir Percy lay on his deathbed, the major's father was born, and his grandfather listened to the representations of his confessor, Father Rol-liston, and made another will, revoking the former unjust one, but the will was never found, and from that day to this the Briggs have keeped fast seized of the old Haugh, which arter a' was none of Sir Percy's to leave either way, being an entailed estate. But this is an o'er long story, and maybe I have tired your ladyship."

"Not at all, Mistress Mabel," replied Althea ; "I am beholden to you, for you have given me a clear detail of many matters of which I had a very confused idea ; for though so nearly related to the family of the Philipsons, I never heard their name pass

my mother's lips, which you have now accounted for, by explaining the grounds of the feuds between our families."

"I could tell you, dear lady, a mort more, but it grows late, so I'll wish your ladyship a right good night's rest. Mistress Millicent will find a snug neat bed in the light closet, to the right of the state bed: and if you should please to lack aught in the night, you need only tinkle the silver bell on the little stand by the bedside, and I shall surely hear, for I sleep hard by."

Dame Mabel then made a second reverence, and withdrew.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALTHEA'S thoughts were in too perturbed a state that night to admit of her paying much attention to the covert endeavours of Milly, who was desirous of learning her mistress's true sentiments in regard to her sudden and unexpected change of abode ; for that damsel by no means believed that the displeasure which Althea manifested towards her lover could be sincere.

The next morning, on opening the curtains, Milly pertinaciously returned to the attack, exclaiming in admiration of the neatness and cheerfulness of the apartment, and the lightness and elegance of the furniture, and above

all, was profuse in her applause of the toilet and all its conveniences, and elaborate auxiliaries to dress and luxury.

“ Very different I trow from your chamber and dressing-table at Calgarth Haugh, madam, with a dull fixed glass, shaded by a purple hood and lappets, and the dismal device of a skull and hourglass above it to crown all. Well, it must be owned that Golgotha would be a more fitting name for the house you have left than Calgarth, for it might properly be called the place of a skull.”

Here the damsel paused, and looked at her lady, in the hopes of hearing some comment on the text of the toilet service, from which she had been holding forth, but Althea was silent and abstracted.

“ Dainty sweet waters these, madam,” continued Milly, sprinkling the Hungary water over her lady’s handkerchief. “ I wonder how a young bachelor major came to think of all things so proper for a lady’s use at

her toilet. A passing sweet husband he will make, by my fay. What think you, madam?"

"I am not in the humour to hear you talk so much; and, above all, I would have you take heed that I am not accustomed to be questioned by my waiting-woman."

"No sooner was Milly silenced by this unpropitious response, than nurse Mabel made her appearance, with Major Philipson's inquiries after Althea's health, and how she had rested, concluding with his humble request, that she would admit him to her breakfast-table in the circular parlour."

"You may tell the Major, my good Mabel," replied Althea, "that I have rested ill, in consequence of my alarms, occasioned by his inconsiderate conduct last night, and that if I breakfast at all it will be by myself."

Mabel was petrified at the ungracious tenor of this reply, and was beginning a pathetic remonstrance, commencing with,

“Alack, alack !” but Althea cut her short, by saying, “Such is my message, and I do intreat that it may be delivered verbatim.”

After Althea had taken breakfast solus in the circular parlour, Mabel again presented herself, with Major Philipson’s request that she would honour him with her company for a walk round the island.

“Tell Major Philipson that I do not feel sufficiently in spirits to walk just now ; and I beg, Mrs. Mabel, that you will promise me not to bring any more of his messages ; at the same time I am loth to answer so gentle a messenger harshly.”

“Nay, nay, my bonny bird, I cannot make any such promise, for if you be so hardhearted as to be o’er cruel to the Major, I could ne’er deny carrying any word he chose to send by me. Blessings o’ the sweet face o’ him. Didst ne’er hear the wofu’ tragedy o’ cruel Barbara Allen ?”

“I believe I am well acquainted with that

doleful history," replied Althea, smiling at the simplicity of old Mabel.

"I thought for sure thou'dst never heard it, or else perchance forgotten the sore repentance o' scornfu' Barbara when it was too late to save her true fere.

Oh mother, mother, make my bed,
For I shall die to-morrow.

Think o' that, lady fair, ere ye slight a noble gentleman, that loves ye so truly as the Major does. Oh mony's the night and oft that he has passed in his little skiff, wi' his bright blue ee'n ay fixed on the chamber casements where ye slept at Calgarth Haugh, and when at home he grew careless in his 'parelling, and stomachless at meals, and aye wandered by himsel' among the groves, and wad gi' me no account o' his sighs, till I got it out o' Wat Sorby, that the master was stark wode for love of his fair cousin fra' Lunnon that wonned at Calgarth Haugh."

Althea did not hear this relation unmoved,

but she persisted in dismissing the simple-hearted messenger with a direct refusal to Philipson's request.

She was in fact most seriously displeased and perplexed by the rash step Philipson had taken, which had, in truth, placed her every way in a most awkward predicament, since she was firm in her resolve to refuse contracting a marriage in opposition to her mother's last will and dying commands, previously to her attaining her twenty-first year, and she could not disguise from herself that if she resided in Philipson's house in the interim, evil tongues would not scruple to wound her reputation. If, after what had occurred on the preceding night she returned to Calgarth Hall, she was convinced that Briggs would take every advantage of this misadventure, by imposing on her double restraints, accompanied with every species of base and ungenerous taunts.

Whilst she was still absorbed in these

painful reflections, dubious which course it would be most prudent to pursue, she was interrupted by a light tap at the door, which was immediately followed by the entrance of Philipson, who, saluting her with a profound bow, said:

“The Major, understanding that you do not wish to receive any more messages from him, has done himself the honour of bringing his request in person, that you will favour him with half an hour’s conversation.”

“You have not allowed me the opportunity of refusing your request, Major Philipson,” replied Althea, “or be assured that I should not very readily have admitted you into my presence on any pretext.”

“Unkind one!” said he, seating himself beside her, and endeavouring to possess himself of her hand, “wherefore this ungentle treatment—this undeserved scorn?”

“Really, sir, after your late outrage, what other treatment can you expect?”

“Oh, I looked for very, very different. In truth, I am conscious of nothing in my conduct but what merits your applause.”

“I protest, the daring manner in which you brave the matter out is more unpardonable than the offence itself,” said Althea, angrily, turning away.

“I had hoped, my fair cousin, to have found you in a more reasonable humour this morning,” returned Philipson; “nevertheless, I do most humbly implore your pardon for all my unintentional offences.”

“That is not enough,” said Althea.

“Not enough? Well, then, I will try to be sorry for what I have done; but I am sadly afraid I shall not succeed in the attempt; for, *malgré* your displeasure, while I look upon you I am only too happy.”

“Happy that you have forfeited my good opinion, Philipson?”

“Delighted that I have rescued you from the clutches of your fell gaoler, even at the

price of encountering your unjust displeasure," said Philipson, tenderly.

"But you have placed me in a worse predicament than that in which I before most unhappily stood," returned Althea.

"Nay, my sweet cousin, how so? Were you not forced to endure much constraint and contradiction from your puritan relatives, and, above all, obliged to attend the sectarian holdings-forth of Briggs and that squinting fool, his chaplain; and had not Briggs the insolence to pretend to your hand, and persecute you with his odious addresses after he had for ever forfeited all pretensions to the character of either guardian or lover by leaving you to perish without remorse or pity, like a flinty-hearted villain as he is! Is it for snatching you from protection like that you upbraid me, and tell me I have forfeited your good opinion? By heavens! I shall grow angry, too, if I talk over the matter thus!"

"Major Philipson, I have no wish for you

to enlarge upon the subject. Let matters stand as they will in regard to the man whom I have the misfortune to call guardian, you have removed me from under the care and protection of my only female relative against my own consent, and without a shadow of pretence for so doing, except that I had acknowledged feelings towards you of which I now——”

“Consider me unworthy, I suppose you would say, madam!” interrupted Philipson, rising in great agitation.

“Of which I *then* deemed you fully worthy; but your own unadvised rashness has placed us in a different situation!”

“Why so, Althea?”

“Because you must be aware that you have done me an irreparable injury, if you reflect for a moment, on what has passed, as my reputation must receive a severe wound from my residence, for any time, in the house of a gay young cavalier like yourself,

unsanctioned by the presence of any female of respectability above the rank of a servant. You have cruelly placed me in this most distressing case by your lawless manner of making me your captive, and carrying me off to your home, unprovided even with a change of dress."

Philipson, who had never given these circumstances, so distressing to female delicacy, a moment's consideration before, felt painfully disconcerted by the first part of Althea's speech.

"I do, indeed, feel the justice of your representations, and acknowledge that my impetuous rashness has placed you in a most delicate situation, and in this dilemma I see no course that can be pursued by you, except the prudent and excellent one of becoming my wife, without subjecting you to the world's censure by a day's delay. There is a chapel dedicated to Our Lady in the island hard by, and I have a worthy chaplain re-

siding on the spot. He is, it is true, of the Romish confession—mine own faith—but Wat Sorby will, at a word, take boat and ferry us over to the curate of Bowness, who lives under my protection, and who will joyfully unite us according to the ceremonial of the Church of England, and thus you will be doubly mine own.”

“ You take ample advantage of your own wrong in your argument, sir,” replied Althea ; “ but be assured that what I refused on the grounds of conscience, to the voice of affection, and the strong pleadings of mine own heart, which but too powerfully seconded your suit to me, I will never yield to the urgency of convenience or expediency.” She paused, and sighed deeply.

Philipson threw himself at her feet, and besought her forgiveness with the most passionate eloquence, and earnestly pleaded that she would not sacrifice their mutual happiness to an idle punctilio.

“It is not an idle punctilio,” she replied, “but a conscientious adherence to a solemn promise, as I told you yester-even by the lake side. Nor will I, according to that promise, make any matrimonial engagement till I have attained unto my twenty-first year, without the consent of my guardian, to whom, you are aware, it would be useless to apply.”

“Why, in good sooth, it would be a passing pleasant joke to send me to Calgarth for the purpose of asking Bat Briggs’ blessing on our marriage, but a still more extravagant notion to suppose that our happiness must be incomplete for the want of his benediction!”

“There is one remedy,” said Althea, smiling at his bluntness—“patience. We must delay our union till the very short period that yet remains of my minority be expired. His control over me ceases then, and my promise remains unbroken.”

“But then, Althea, you would not be

content to remain as my guest till that time arrives ?”

“ No, surely,” said Althea ; “ that would be a violation of every female decorum. You must repair the mischief you have done as well as you can, by instantly restoring me to that home from whence you so lawlessly took me.”

“ No, let me beg cousin Bat’s blessing on our union at swords’ points first,” exclaimed Philipson, angrily, “ if, indeed, it be such an indispensable preliminary to wedding the man who adores you, and whom yester-even you said you loved.”

“ Whom yester-even I also esteemed,” said Althea, pointedly.

“ By heavens ! the love of any woman is valueless who can withdraw her esteem so suddenly, and on such slight grounds, from a man who adores her, and who would die for her sake,” cried Philipson, indignantly flinging out of the room, leaving Althea not

only astonished at his daring to be angry with her, but somewhat fearful that she had offended her fiery lover almost beyond reconciliation, by the reproachful tone she had assumed during their conference.

She expected that he would make his appearance at dinner, but when noon arrived, and she was summoned to that meal, she perceived that preparations were only made for one person; and, to her great surprise, she was left to the indulgence of her own solitary reflections the rest of the day.

The next morning, a tire-woman from Kendal arrived, escorted by Wat Sorby, who had induced (such was the popularity which he and his master enjoyed in the neighbourhood, despite of the ominous cognomen borne by Philipson) a fair damsel of the said vocation to put herself and her wares under his guidance, in the major's skiff, and present herself to receive Althea's orders. Althea made choice of such things as were at present

necessary, and as she had a well-stored purse about her, paid for them, in spite of the remonstrances of the said damsel, who assured her fair customer that the major had forbidden her to receive any settlement but from him. However, Althea was pertinacious in refusing to accept such obligation, and was left in possession of some of the newest *modes* in the North.

That morning she saw nothing of Philipson, although she received a polite but formal inquiry respecting her health, through Mabel, accompanied by an intimation that there were musical instruments, and a library well stored with choice books, at her command; likewise that she could take exercise in any part of the little island she might wish to visit without fear of interruption or intrusion. This was a line of conduct that Althea had not expected Philipson to pursue—it being so totally opposite to his character. She endeavoured to reconcile herself to it, with the

consideration that it was best for them both that it should be thus—yet she was restless and uneasy.

She repaired to the library, which contained most of the rich literature of the era of Elizabeth and the earlier days of James. She cast her eyes over a few pages of Lord Berner's translation of the "Chronicles of Sir John Froissart," that was open on the window-seat, which possessed the additional attraction of having one of Philipson's high military gloves lying on it, and by that sign and token Althea rightly judged had recently occupied his attention. Notwithstanding this inducement, and the captivating narrations of the most imaginative writer that ever laid claim to the sober title of historian, the knightly chronicler had no unison with a mind agitated with the tumults of a first love-quarrel. She exchanged Froissart for Spenser's "Faërie Queen," and that she abandoned as hastily for Tasso's "Gierusalem Libe-

ratá.” This last she chanced to open at the quarrel between Armida and Rinaldo, and as she proceeded in the well-known, but ever-new scene, she thought that she had been as unreasonable as the royal enchantress ; and, secretly wondering whether her offended lover would prove as forgiving as Rinaldo, she closed the book.

From the library she strolled to the lawn, and from the lawn to the lime-grove, and there she encountered Philipson. He started, and changed colour as their eyes met. Raising his hat, he inquired after her health with cold politeness. Althea’s heart swelled proudly, the colour rushed to her cheek, but she commanded herself sufficiently to reply in a corresponding tone to these questions ; and, curtsying haughtily, she swept past him with an air of well-assumed indifference, and, returning to the house, took refuge in the library, where coldness and loftiness both forsook her, and she gave way to a violent

burst of tears ; these, as disdain succeeded to softness, she hastily dashed away, and, seizing a pen, wrote on a piece of paper :

“ Althea Woodville would know by what right Major Robert Philipson detains her as his prisoner ? ”

Then, ringing the bell that stood before her, she ordered a light. When it was brought, she sealed the billet, and, without looking up, told the person who just entered to let Major Philipson have that letter without delay. The recipient party, instead of leaving the room instantly to execute her bidding, as she expected, broke the seal and unfolded the paper. Althea, in mingled surprise and indignation, raised her eyes, and met those of Philipson, to whom she had inadvertently given the letter directed to himself, not doubting but he was the same person who had brought her a lighted taper not a minute before.

“It is not my wish to put any constraint upon your liberty, madam,” said Philipson, after reading the brief contents of the paper, “far less to be the unhappy cause of a moment’s pain to you, Althea,” he added, in a tenderer voice, and with softening eyes, on perceiving the traces of recent tears upon Althea’s cheeks.

She tried to speak, but her lip quivered, and she turned away.

Philipson was evidently much distressed. The tears of a woman were ever to him irresistible, and when they flowed from the eyes of Althea, they made him suffer the most painful emotion:

“Only make your wishes known to me, and they shall be fulfilled, even if calculated to rend my very heart,” said he.

“It is my wish to leave this place,” sobbed Althea.

“Immediately?” asked he, in a faltering tone.

“Immediately,” she replied, in a more decided voice.

“Be it so, madam. But whither will you go?”

Althea wept afresh :

“Anywhere. To Calgarth Hall. I have now no other home.”

“Oh, Althea,” cried Philipson, “how are you destroying the happiness of both by this wayward pride!”

“I do not understand your meaning, sir.”

“Indeed?” he sighed, deeply.

And Althea said :

“I wish we had never met.”

“*I* will not say so,” returned he, tenderly, but reproachfully.

And Althea burst into a fresh passion of tears. He took her hand, and said :

“Althea, why is all this distress? I give you pain, it seems. I, who would rather receive a thousand bodily wounds than see you shed a tear. If it be, indeed, your wish

to return to Calgarth Hall, I will conduct you thither this very day—nay, within this hour. Far be it from me to treat you as my captive. I thought, it is true, to have secured our mutual happiness, instead of incurring your irreconcilable displeasure, by boldly delivering you from the ungentle keeping of your gaoler at Calgarth; but since you will persist in considering my rashness as an unforgivable offence, for which I am to be punished with the loss of your esteem, it were indeed best that we should part——”

“You have taken up my words too hastily, when you say that I have deprived you of my esteem. I could not be so ungrateful as so far to forget the inestimable service you once so nobly rendered me.”

“Indeed, Althea, you have affirmed the same more than once.”

“No, Major Philipson; you purposely misunderstood me, that you might have pretext for telling me my love was valueless.”

“Did *I* say so, Althea?”

“Yes, sir, *you did* say so.”

“Then, by Cupid and all his court, I lied, for perverse as thou art, tormentress, thy love is dearer to me than life. And though glory be the deity I have hitherto worshipped from my earliest years, yet would I rather be engaged in ten lost battles than in one quarrel with thee. And now, my beautiful Althea, as we have both been to blame, it seems, and each waywardly given the other much unnecessary pain in this our groundless dispute, let us mutually forgive and end it, like all other lovers’ quarrels, with a kiss.”

“It is astonishing to me how soon you resume your wonted audacity,” said Althea, pouting, but at the same time granting the pledge of reconciliation.

“And now, were it not as well,” resumed he, “that we despatched Wat Sorby without delay to induce the curate of Bowness to undertake a voyage to our Lady’s Isle,

here to unite us in sweet indissoluble bonds?"

"Urge it not, Philipson, for it cannot be," said Althea.

"But it can be, it must be, it shall be!" returned Philipson, impetuously. "See, here is the ring with which my lady mother was wedded to mine honoured father, and the same golden fetter will fit your fair finger, I doubt not." He took it from his pocket-book and placed it on her slender finger. "It fits passing well, as close as if chosen for the very purpose. Ah, that you would permit me to place it there this very day, according to the rites of holy church!"

Althea drew the golden circlet from her finger and looked at it intently, reading at the same time the poesy, or motto, engraven :

The jewel's set within.

"It is so now," rejoined her lover, replacing it on her fair finger.

“A pretty conceit indeed,” replied Althea, “and a piece of surpassing flattery, though in small space. This ring,” she resumed, “I will in good truth accept and wear, but as a pledge of our betrothment only, Philipson.”

Finding Althea thus resolute in her refusal of an immediate marriage, Philipson was fain to receive this voluntary promise of a union at a distant period with becoming gratitude, and the ring remained on Althea's finger.

CHAPTER IX.

THE remainder of that day beheld the lovers—the happier now for their late dissensions—strolling together through the beautiful glades of that most picturesque little isle, or seated beneath the shade of some spreading tree, or lingering on the shore of the lovely lake, discussing the past, the present, and the future of their destinies, and exchanging vows of love and constancy. Little was thought of the expediency of Althea's removal from the Long Holme till the following day, when she again recurred to the serious impropriety of her remaining an inhabitant of the same house with her lover. Philipson could think

of no other remedy but marriage, and Althea was as firm as before in withholding her consent.

“If,” said she, “you had any female relative abiding with you, an aunt, a mother, or a sister, I should not form any serious objection to remaining under your roof, but circumstanced as you are, I shall most certainly fall under the censure of evil tongues if I continue here.”

“Not if you resolve to avoid all false constructions by becoming my wife,” replied Philipson, returning pertinaciously to the charge.

“I had not remained Althea Woodville so long,” she replied, with a smile, “if importunity could have prevailed; but positively I must leave Holme Island without delay, although I confess that the thoughts of a return to Calgarth Hall are hateful to me.”

“It must not be thought of,” interrupted Philipson, with vehemence.

“Then,” said Althea, “some other plan must instantly be adopted, for every hour increases the impropriety of my situation.”

Philipson then suggested a compromise, to which Althea did not object. His venerable chaplain, Father Rolliston, occupied a small tenement on the island, called Priest House, being the residence formerly assigned by the Abbot of Furness to the officiating minister of the chapel of the Lady Holme. As the Lady Holme was too small to afford a home to any living creature, Father Rolliston and his sister had occupied Priest House for nearly forty years, under the protection of the family of Philipson, and the major now proposed that Mrs. Edith should for the present exchange her hermitage for the Holme House, to bear Althea company, while he vacated his own apartments there and took up his abode with his chaplain in Priest House. The plan was agreed and acted upon forthwith; yet Philipson, though he

slept not within half a mile of the Holme House, repaired thither every morning to visit Althea, and passed the chief of the day in her society. They read, walked, and sang together, and became every hour dearer to each other.

Meantime, Colonel Briggs sent threatening messages to Philipson, demanding his ward, and menacing him with the most terrible vengeance if she were not given up forthwith. The cavalier treated these with utter contempt, and did not consider it necessary to communicate them to Althea. Briggs did not confine himself to empty threats, but commenced a formidable attack on the Long Holme with a fleet of armed gunboats, which he had been preparing from the day after her abduction.

Althea found to her infinite consternation and alarm that the island was in a complete state of blockade; her terror increased with the incessant roar of firearms rever-

berated by the remarkable echo from the fells. For a whole week she saw little of Philipson, who was completely engaged in the defence of the island. She could only weep and pray for his preservation with Mrs. Edith Rolliston and nurse Mabel, and lament the headlong rashness which had involved him in this peril. She sent repeated messages to him, entreating him to give her up and not allow the contest to be further prolonged; but his determination was indomitable.

On the eighth night of the siege, Althea was roused from a troubled slumber by a sudden blaze of light, followed by a succession of terrific explosions. She sprang from her bed, and, rushing to the window, perceived that the flames proceeded from several of the hostile boats, which Philipson had fired by means of hand-grenades that he had successfully flung amidst the little armada of the besiegers. Explosion succeeded explosion, in consequence of the blowing up of the vessels

as the fire communicated to their powder-stores. A line of terrific splendour was extended far and wide over the lake, and a red glory over the horizon, that made the beams of the setting moon wax fainter from the contrast of that gloomy brightness. The echoes from the islands, the lake shores, and the guardian hills around prolonged and multiplied every discharge of shot from the burning vessels, the sounds of which were mingled with the cries of the terrified cattle and the wild screams of the aquatic birds, that were disturbed in their secret retreats by the general commotion on the lake. The utmost confusion and panic were spread among the blockading party. Scarcely waiting for a signal of retreat from their commander, the crews of the only three boats that remained uninjured sheered off amidst the exulting shouts of the defenders of the Long Holme.

When Philipson met Althea in the morning, he announced his intention of making

reprisals on Colonel Briggs, by an attack on Calgarth Hall that very night.

“To-night?” echoed Althea, becoming very pale. “Oh, not to-night, my Philipson; take at least a short interval for the rest and refreshment so necessary for yourself and your people.”

“And so give Briggs and his roundheads time and reflection to recover from the panic in which they sheered off last night. No, no, my love, there is nothing like following up one good home blow with another.”

Althea shook her head, and turned her tearful eyes with pleading glances on his face in mute entreaty.

“There is only one condition,” said he, “that can induce me to suspend my intention, and that depends on yourself.”

“Name it, name it!” cried Althea, eagerly.

“Then,” said Philipson, “if you will promise to marry me to-morrow, I will stay at home to-day and promise to delay my expe-

dition against Calgarth Hall a whole week. Nay, I am not sure that I could resist your conjugal entreaties to remain in quiet for a longer period," continued he, gaily.

"Philipson, you know it cannot be," replied Althea; "and if my tears and prayers are unavailing now, small would be my hopes of prevailing with you after you possessed the power of commanding my silence."

"Why, my life, my love," exclaimed Philipson, laughing, "do you think that my conduct as a spouse would be modelled after the domestic manners of Bat Briggs, who raps out his orders to the ladies as rudely as a sergeant of troopers speaks to his recruits? No such savage proceedings to be apprehended from your devoted Robert Philipson, who will engage to prove himself the most obliging and dutiful of husbands, if you will only venture to become his wife."

"Can you suppose," replied Althea, sadly, "that it is without an intense struggle that I

deny myself an undoubted title to your protection, to share your home, your joy, your cares, and your perils, and to possess your beloved society without reproach or reserve?"

Philipson offered a rejoinder equally tender, yet they parted each unchanged in resolve.

In the evening, he again visited Holme House, to exchange a final adieu with Althea. As the moment of parting approached, Althea, on whose heart a heavy feeling of melancholy foreboding preyed most painfully, was strongly tempted to purchase his stay even on the so oft-refused terms of an immediate marriage. It required all her firmness to adhere to her conscientious resolves, and when she had received his last farewell, and watched his landing from the Long Holme Island, she remained by the lake-side in hopeless despondence, wishing him to return and once more propose his stay on the same terms as in the morning; but hour after

hour passed away till the shades of twilight deepened into darkness on the lake. It was, she thought, a night well suited to the purposes of the beloved adventurer, moonless, starless, and densely clouded. Her apprehension that he would take advantage of its unusual gloom to carry his project into execution was confirmed by the low, laving sound of muffled oars which at length met her anxious ear, and the black shadows of the boats that glided over the face of the dark lake which flowed beneath the rocky isle of the Long Holme, where sat Althea on a craggy projection, watching the little fleet as it silently but rapidly moved onward till it was lost in the double obscurity of night and distance. A heavy shower of rain, that soon after began to fall, drove Althea to the shelter of Holme House.

When the little household retired to rest, unable to endure the thoughts of repose, Althea took her station at the window of her apart-

ment, and unclosing the Gothic casement, she kept for some time an agitating vigil. At length the sudden flash and report of firearms apprized her that the attack on Calgarth Hall had commenced, and at intervals during the whole of the night the mingled sounds of battle reached her through the darkness and gloom. Towards morning, an awful thunder-storm added its terrors to the flash and roar of the artillery, so as to render it difficult at times to decide whether the deep reverberations of loud and successive explosions proceeded from the sharp volleys upon and from Calgarth Hall or from the thunder-claps that echoed from hill to hill.

Day broke through lurid clouds of purple and angry red, and the first brightening of the dawn was reflected on thick wreaths of sulphureous smoke, which hung low and heavy on the face of the lake, as if unwilling to ascend into the damp air. There was an evident pause alike in the conflict above and

below. Nothing was to be heard from the shores of Calgarth; nothing could be seen. There was a gloomy stillness prevailing abroad that was more appalling to Althea than even the rage of battle or the fury of the storm.

The rain that had fallen in torrents at times during the night had now subsided, but the oppressive closeness of the atmosphere indicated that the tempest was only gathering strength by delay. Althea was overcome by the sultriness of the air, and feeling as if change of place would relieve the restless agitation that tortured her, she hastily descended from her apartment into the open air, and sought that side of the islet which commanded the best view of Calgarth. When she reached the very spot where she had lingered so late on the preceding night, to her infinite surprise she beheld Merab seated on the same craggy projection that she had occupied, herself the preceding evening, looking with her wild dress, and

wilder expression, a figure in perfect unison with the scene.

She was singing in low, sweet tones, a plaintive air, the words of which were in a foreign language, of peculiar softness, the sound of which was perfectly new to Althea's ear.

On the approach of the lady she changed both her measure and her song. Rising from her seat, and raising her finger with a sort of prophetic solemnity, she sang, in a voice that produced in Althea's bosom a thrilling sensation of mingled terror and sadness, the following stanzas :

The battle is o'er,
But he comes not again ;
There's blood on the shore,
But he's not with the slain.
It were sweeter to him
That ye wept o'er his bier,
Than your eye should grow dim
With the tale ye must hear.
Ye parted in sorrow,
Yet dreamt not I ween,
How dismal a morrow
Should rise from such e'en.

For the tears of your parting,
Fair maid, shall be sweet,
To those wildly starting
Again when ye meet.

Ye shall meet in that sadness
No words can declare,
And shall part in the madness
Of utter despair.

“Oh, tell me, tell me the worst without further torturing me by ambiguous oracles of evil import!” cried Althea, in response to this ditty.

“The worst!” said Merab, fixing her eyes on Althea’s face; “and how will you bear to hear it?”

“I can bear anything but to hear of his death,” said Althea.

“He is not dead; but ——”

“You do not mean to tell me he is a prisoner, and to Colonel Briggs?” shrieked Althea.

“Even so, lady; and if you would rescue him from a felon’s death you must not waste the precious moments in tears and cries, but hasten at once to Calgarth.”

“But how?” asked Althea, turning her streaming eyes on Merab.

“I will row you there, and land you unperceived among the garden bowers whence you may make your way safely to her who is ready to befriend you,” said Merab.

“Tarry, rash lady!” cried Father Rolliston, who had been attracted to the spot by Althea’s shriek; “would you enter the snare of the tempter so lightly?”

Althea struggled for utterance, like one who strives to speak in a fit of the nightmare and cannot.

“Know you not,” said the priest, crossing himself, “that this woman is the daughter of a sorceress, and herself a dealer with the powers of darkness. She hath gained strange knowledge from the unhallowed whispering of evil spirits. The curses which fell on Manasseh, the wizard king of Judah, and his posterity, will cleave to all who ally themselves with her.”

“And what art thou, Cyril Rolliston, but the outlawed priest of a fallen and doomed Church?” retorted Merab, fiercely. “See I not the dark destiny that doth encompass thee, and the fearful death thou shalt die?”

“Forbear thy taunts, daughter of perdition,” said the old man, sternly regarding her. “Unhappy but wilful wanderer in the unhallowed mazes of witchcraft.”

“Ay, witchcraft is an easy and convenient accusation to fling on the innocent,” replied Merab; “but there was a wizard pope of Rome as well as a wizard king of Judah, I trow!”

“By whomsoever practised, magic is an accursed thing,” rejoined the priest. “Listen not to her deluding words, lady, for she is enleagued with the prince of the power of the air. Trust her not as you value body and soul.”

“Oh, but his life is at stake!” gasped Althea.

“She says so ; but ask your own reason how she should know it ? Should we not have seen the return of the boats if his enterprise had been a failure ?” said the priest.

“See you there !” said Merab, pointing to the little squadron of boats that were making their way from the shores of Calgarth with desperate haste. One shot before the rest, and Wat Sorby, pale, haggard, and bleeding, hastily sprang to land.

“All is lost !” cried he, in an accent of despair ; “our brave major is captured.”

Although prepared by the wild warnings of Merab for this intelligence, Althea received it with a shriek, that was repeated by all the echoes of the island.

“I swear by the bright planets, Jupiter and Venus, and all the host of heaven,” said Merab, “that I would rush through flame and flood, through the death volley and the levelled steel, to save a man who loved me as you are loved.”

“What can I—what shall I do?” cried Althea, wringing her hands.

“Make up your mind when you hear his knell,” answered Merab, with a bitter laugh.

“Strive not to detain me!” said Althea, to Father Rolliston, “for I will go, whatever may betide me.”

“Listen to my counsel, young lady,” said Father Rolliston, “and give not yourself up rashly to the guidance of a dealer in occult art; a message from you to Colonel Briggs may, perhaps, do more in this matter than an interview which, by bringing out personal antipathies and political antagonism, would make things worse. While you remain here there is a possibility that he may be induced to exchange Major Philipson for you; but what hope or chance will exist if you put yourself unconditionally into his hands?”

Wat Sorby now related the circumstances under which the capture of his commander

was effected. The drawbridge having been forced, the garrison cried out for quarter, and raised the portcullis, rightly judging that Philipson would be the first to enter, which he did—in advance of his party—and before any one could follow it was hastily flung down, and he was shut in singly. He and Colonel Briggs fought fiercely hand to hand in the quadrangle, but he was overpowered by numbers after a desperate resistance.

“All we could do after that,” continued Sorby, “was to give them a farewell volley which shattered their windows, but to rescue our brave major was impossible. Colonel Briggs has so long thirsted for his blood that he will surely take it, now he is at last in his power. And father, there will be no one to administer the last offices of the Church unless you go to him.”

“I will, if it costs me my life,” said the priest; “my resolve is taken.”

“And mine!” cried Althea.

CHAPTER X.

A DEEP swell of psalmody was heard at some distance from the precincts of Calgarth Hall. A file of soldiers were drawn up under arms in the lake court of the mansion. Their blood-stained garments and features, soiled with smoke and dust, and still agitated with the fierce expression and angry flush that had been called up by recent excitement, bore testimony to their having been lately engaged in a hot and deadly combat. These were uplifting their voices in a strain of thanksgiving, according to the custom of their sect, for the signal advantage they had just gained over their foe.

The Calgarth Hall carpenter was busily engaged in the background in constructing the frame-work of a gibbet; but the noise of the hammer and saw appeared to occasion no disturbance to the choir military, who, with Samuel Stunner as their leader, sang more loudly and lustily as the knocking waxed louder. Opposite to the spot where the gibbet was preparing a pulpit was placed in which Master Elkanah Nobbs was conveniently stationed.

Colonel Briggs, with a pale and gloomy countenance, his head enveloped in a black bandage, that covered the deep sword-cut he had received in a personal encounter with Philipson, and his arm in a sling, was seated in an easy chair, attended by Bethuliel, who stood at his right hand holding a salver on which were cordials and volatiles. By the assistance of these, Colonel Briggs supported himself, though with difficulty, the muscles of his face were occasionally convulsed, and

bore evidence to the severe bodily pain he suffered. His eyes were heavy and languid, but still he kept them fixed, with cruel satisfaction, on the preparations making for the execution of his prisoner, which he ever and anon endeavoured to hasten by his impatient gestures and by hurrying messages to the carpenter, who, truth to tell, appeared by no means impressed with the necessity of bringing the work to a conclusion, but evidently bestowed more time on the neat finish of the machine he was constructing by measuring, planing, and polishing, than was anywise requisite for the purpose.

Not remote from this spot, and in full view of the prisoner himself, two other men were employed in framing a rough coffin destined to receive his remains after the murderous work of vengeance should be completed.

These preparations were surveyed with an undaunted eye by Philipson, as he stood

fettered between two roundhead soldiers. The white scarf which was wrapped about his sword-arm was literally soaked in blood; he was without his cloak, and bareheaded; his dress was altogether much disarranged, torn, and marked with sanguine stains, his bright ringlets were dishevelled, and he occasionally shook them back from his face with an impatient gesture, and more than once made an effort to get his hands at liberty, which movement caused Briggs, in spite of bodily pain and weakness, to start from his chair, and bawl to the men to look to the prisoner at peril of their lives.

Philipson smiled scornfully at this, glanced carelessly over the scene before him, and whistled "Prince Rupert's Rant." Notwithstanding his fatigue and loss of blood, the awful circumstances in which he stood, and the dreadful preparations he was compelled to witness, his eye retained its wonted fire, and his bearing its usual daring intrepidity.

dity; if he testified uneasiness at anything, it was at the vocal exertions of Samuel Stunner, and the choir of psalm-singers militant. Of these Briggs himself was no less impatient than his victim, and raising his hand, he made a signal to Samuel Stunner to cease, but Samuel was in the very cream of a quaver, and in spite of all intimations of his commander's displeasure, continued to trill and shake on the note in a most donkey-like strain of dissonance, followed by the voices of all the choir, good, bad, and indifferent; and they obstinately persevered in singing a psalm of thirty-eight verses to the end.

“By my faith,” soliloquized Philipson, “a man with ears of any sensibility would incontinently prefer being hanged outright to the affliction of another hour of this solemn braying.”

In short, it was difficult to determine which was most weary of the psalmody, the doomer or the doomed. But men's lungs are not

really formed of leather, and even if they were, they must in time crack with undue exertion. There is a point beyond which human nature cannot go in any of its functions—the vocalists had gone to the very extremity of their powers, most manfully, regardless of hoarseness, faltering, squeaking, and wheezing—they had arrived at the *ne plus ultra* of their energies, and were—silent.

Elkanah Nobbs, as if doubtful that the pause would be of brief continuance, seized the lucky moment to commence the prisoner's funeral sermon, by giving out his text according to the previous instructions of his patron : “And the king of Ai, he hanged on a tree until eventide.”

Elkanah then paused, and shaking all the sands out of his hour-glass, turned it up, and placed it before him.

“Cousin Bat,” cried the prisoner, “I am loth to ask any favour of you, but, positively, I can't stand during an hour's preaching, so

if you will not have the civility to defer the sermon till after my death, I must trouble you for a chair."

"There is no chair at hand, and if there were, it will best become a deboshed malignant like yourself to stand," returned Briggs, sullenly.

Philipson flashed upon him a look of unutterable contempt, and turning to the joiners, who had just finished putting the coffin together he said :

"Give over planing, and panelling, and polishing up that coffin, it will do passing well as it is ; and as it is intended for my accommodation, I'll warrant you I shall not fault your work when you come to lay me in it, but in the meantime I have a use for it, so bring it hither, my lads ; heave it bottom upwards, and let me sit down upon it. It will be a kindness, I do assure you, for I am a-weary, and in sooth, my traitor limbs seem half disposed to forsake their office."

Briggs eyed him with a glance that seemed to say :

“Were it not for pure shame, I would refuse thee now even this poor indulgence ;” but as he continued silent, the more compassionate framers of Philipson’s last resting-place complied with the prisoner’s request, and placed the coffin according to his directions. Philipson sank down upon it, and his guards, in obedience to a signal from their commander, seated themselves on either side of him for the greater security, while two others advanced and stood with drawn swords in front, lest the prisoner should meditate and endeavour to carry into execution any desperate attempt at making his escape. Of this, however, there was little probability, for overcome with the weariness of the perpetual vigils he had kept during the blockade of his island, and much fatigued by the energetic exertions he had used for the last twelve hours, added to the exhaustion, of loss of

blood, and want of refreshment, Philipson leant his head against the shoulder of one of his guards, and sank into a profound sleep.

The most moving periods of Elkanah Nobb's sermon, an odd compound of politics and divinity, in which he endeavoured to prove, by wresting several passages of scripture to his purpose, that it was perfectly lawful and proper to put to death all notorious, malignant and perverse-minded enemies; to wit, all opposers of the peculiar opinions of his sect, could not effect the slightest disturbance to the prisoner's slumbers—nor even the renewal of the thunder-storm, which, seeming as if its temporary cessation had only strengthened its fury, came up again with redoubled violence, and out-roaring the preacher, induced Master Elkanah to bring his sermon to conclusion a full half-hour sooner than he had intended, to the infinite satisfaction of Colonel Briggs, who grudged his victim not only the respite, but the peace-

ful repose he had enjoyed whilst his funeral sermon was preaching.

Scarcely had the sounds ceased of the chaplain's last emphatic sentence, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live," ere Briggs called to the carpenters employed on the gibbet :

"Fellows, is your work complete?"

"Na, your worshipful honour, it is not," was the reply.

"Then make a hasty conclusion, or, by the Covenant, you shall have the first benefit of your work yourself," cried Briggs. "Bethuliel, is the rope in readiness?"

Bethuliel produced it with a ghastly grin from under his arm, where he had held it during the past scene, and Briggs continued :

"Whoever will execute the last office of the law upon the body of the prisoner, Robert Philipson, shall receive a reward of ten broad pieces, with the clothes of the said prisoner,

and whatever gold or jewels he may chance to have about him."

"May it please your honour," cried Bethuliel, eagerly, "I cry first to the said business, and I hope, as it is a matter of some profit, I shall have the preference."

"May it like your honour's worshipfulness," shouted Samuel Stunner, "more than one man will be needed for the job, to do it in a workmanlike manner, on such a desperate and bloody-minded malignant, so I cry half parts to the bargain."

"I won't stand that Master Stunner," rejoined Bethuliel. "Half parts, quotha? Why, any one of the troopers would be my second for a broad piece, and think it a good day's work withal."

"Fellows, cease your brawling," interrupted Briggs, "rouse up the prisoner, and make sure work of him. Let justice take its course on the body of Robert Philipson first, and settle your dispute afterwards."

The men approached Philipson, and Bethuliel, shaking him roughly by the arm, cried, "Awake thou that sleepest."

"Philipson, starting on his feet, cast such a glance of fierce disdain upon his volunteer deathsmen that they drew back in dismay, and almost expected to see him burst his bonds, as the mighty captive of Gaza did of yore, and take a memorable vengeance on them. No one was more thoroughly impressed with this idea than Briggs himself, who, on perceiving the bearing of his prisoner, cried out hastily to the troopers :

"Make ready, present, and fire, if the prisoner offers to stir a foot further, except to the gibbet."

"Cousin Bat," said Philipson, coolly, "you may spare yourself much trouble by ordering your men to fire at once, for I give you my word of honour that I shall never set a step gallows-ward at the bidding of any roundhead."

“Verily,” observed Bethuliel, “I stand amazed at the contumacy of the malignant, for in all my days I never knew a man of any kind refuse to mount the ladder after he had been condemned to the gibbet.”

“That is,” replied Philipson, “because your experience has fallen among felonious villains like yourself, whose birthright the gallows is, and who naturally take possession of their lawful inheritance, as a matter of course.”

“Oh, that thou would’st be persuaded to let me do mine office quietly and discreetly,” said Bethuliel, holding the rope ready twisted into a noose, towards Philipson, in a most inviting manner, yet not daring to approach within arm’s length of him.

“Cowardly scoundrel,” cried Briggs, “are you afraid of a fettered man? Why don’t you throw the rope boldly about his neck, and drag him thereby to the gibbet-foot since he fears to approach it fairly?”

“Fears!” echoed Philipson, sternly, “I have looked death too often in the face to heed it now; but I must needs laugh, though on the threshold of eternity, when I am upbraided with fear by a man who bears my handwriting so legibly scored with sword’s-point on his sconce. Ay, and who has owed his life to my forbearance, too, when he took a fair lady for his shield in the courtyard of the Feathers.”

“Thou hast uttered words, Robert Philipson, which have steeled my heart against all relenting. I might, peradventure, have been weak enough to feel—— Ay, laugh, reckless reprobate, if thou wilt; be assured they shall be atoned for in the bitterest, the most deadly manner.”

“What can’st thou do more than thou wast about to do before I uttered them?” cried Philipson, “and as for thy relenting, cousin Bat, thou may’st talk of it to those who know thee not; but, as for me, I am too

well acquainted with thy vulture-like disposition to give thee the least credit for such a feeling."

"Thou would'st not even deign to accept thy life at my hands, proud spirit, I warrant me," said Briggs, bending forwards, and fixing his heavy, lustreless orbs, on the young cavalier.

"Thou'lt ne'er put me to the proof of that, Bat Briggs," returned Philipson, with a scornful laugh.

"Why then do I name it?"

"You do it in the very spirit of the cat, who, not content with having it in her power to inflict instant death on the victim within her clutches, must needs release it from her merciless talons for a moment, that she may torture it with a hope of that life she never means to give."

"Bear witness for me, my men at arms, how this godless and deboshed fellow hath withstood the compassion I might have felt

for him in regard to our near kindred—how he hath reviled me, mocked me, and set me at nought, and now let his blood be upon his own head,” said Briggs.

“Why don’t you bid them fire, then, without further hypocritical grimace?” cried Philipson.

“Because,” returned Briggs, “I see plainly that thou hast a desire to die a soldier’s death, whereunto thou hast endeavoured to provoke me, in order that I might command my musketeers to silence thy audacious tongue with the death-volley, but this have I withstood because I knew the pride and naughtiness of thy heart, Robert Philipson, and that death was no terror to thee, seeing that thou carest not for the weal of thine immortal soul, and therefore did I wisely refrain myself, to the end thou should’st die the death of a knave, which, peradventure, might have some sting in it, even to thy unconquerable temper.”

“Precisely the motives I imputed to thee, Bartholomew Briggs,” answered Philipson. “How well I knew the stuff whereof thou art made, that even my murder, without so much as even the mockery of a trial, is not sufficient to glut thy malice; but thou must be studious to devise a death that shall be most abhorrent to the feelings of a gentleman and a soldier—base spirit that thou art. I die rejoicing that thou canst not lower me to thy vile standard.”

“Will no one put the rope about his neck, and draw it tight enough to stop his prating?” cried Briggs.

“Hadst thou not better do it thyself, Cousin Bat. It is an office that will well beseem thy generous and exalted character,” replied Philipson, with scornful irony.

But at the moment, when Bethuliel and his compeer had summoned sufficient resolution to approach the fettered prisoner, with intent to cast the rope about his neck, the

hall-door behind them opened, and Mistress Kezia Briggs appeared on the scene, conducting a venerable old man, in whom Philipson, at a glance, recognised Father Rolliston, though his person was unknown to any one else.

“What is the meaning of this intrusion, sister?” cried Briggs, foaming with passion, at the interruption, “and who is this stranger you have dared to bring hither?”

“Brother,” returned she, with characteristic calmness, “I came hither in the hope of preventing you from staining your threshold with the blood of your kinsman, and I adjure you, as you shall answer it at the great and dreadful day of judgment, not to incur the crime of murder.”

“This is no murder, but a military execution,” replied Briggs.

“Lie not to me nor to the deceiving of thine own soul,” rejoined she; “for it is a most foul murder.”

“Sister, I do command thee hence!” vociferated Briggs. “I were loth to expose thee to the scorn of the troopers by ordering them to thrust thee back into the house.”

“Be it at your peril, Bartholomew, that you cause a hand to be raised against my personal freedom,” replied she, firmly.

“In the name of everything that is to be eschewed, wherefore art thou making this coil about the execution of the most debauched fellow in the north,” exclaimed Briggs.

“If God should be extreme to mark what is amiss in thee, how mightest thou abide it?” said Kezia.

“Sister,” interrupted Briggs, rudely, “I am weary of thy texts and thy reproofs; they are out of season, and I once more charge thee to get hence, unless thou wouldst, peradventure, tarry to see the malignant trussed up. And I prythee, who is this fellow whom thou hast brought hither?”

“I am Major Philipson’s chaplain,” said

Father Rolliston. "I am come to offer the last consolations of our holy faith to my beloved friend and patron."

A general groan of disapprobation among the troopers followed this avowal, and Briggs sternly exclaimed :

"A Romish priest — an idolator — an offender against the statutes of the realm, whom I might cause my godly men-at-arms, haters of popery and defiers of the Beast, to thrust through with their weapons of war, and cast into the lake."

"Thou hast the power to do so," replied the old man ; "and if it be the will of that God for whose service I have forsaken all things this world could offer, that I should this hour receive the crown of martyrdom through the instruments of thy wrath, I can only say, do as thou wilt. Thou canst but kill the body. This frail earthly tabernacle, which hath stood the storms of fourscore winters, is not worth a thought. All I ask

is, that thou wilt allow thy prisoner one poor half-hour for performance of the last rites of religion."

"I tell thee nay," said Briggs: "he has stopped his graceless ears like a deaf adder to the pious exhortations of that painful preacher of the word, Master Elkanah Nobbs, and slumbered and slept instead of buying oil for his expiring lamp."

"But," said the priest, "you forget that your chaplain preacheth doctrine opposed to his principles and creed. I ween you would in like manner turn away from the exhortations of a priest of our church."

"Yea," cried Briggs; "but there is, I trow, some difference between my true faith and thy abominable idolatry. Away, then, arch-worshipper of the Beast! I will not suffer any of thy soul-deceiving mummeries to be enacted under the shadow of my walls."

"Ne'er waste thy words in answering him, father," exclaimed Philipson; "a soldier's

preparation must needs be a hasty one at all times. My reckoning will be easily made, as, I bless goodness, my conscience is free from any act of black hypocrisy or wilful murder; therefore I shame not to speak before my foes of the many sins and frailties whereof I humbly crave forgiveness of my Almighty Judge, and absolution from thee."

Father Rolliston signed the cross over Philipson's head as he knelt before him, and whispered the words of absolution.

"I will have no such anti-christian abominations here," cried Colonel Briggs. "Hangman, do your duty."

Bethuliel, who had stolen behind Philipson while he was engaged with Father Rolliston, had succeeded in throwing the noose over his head.

"'Tis well," cried Briggs; "and now, unless he will immediately proceed to the gallows-foot, drag him thither."

"I protest against it as a foul murder,

exclaimed Mrs. Kezia Briggs, holding up her hand.

“Soldiers, tighten the rope,” shouted Briggs, without vouchsafing the slightest attention to her remonstrance, and Philipson was about to yield, as many a brave man had done before him, to the force of circumstances, when Mrs. Kezia Briggs, coolly advancing to the spot, deliberately severed the cord by which Bethuliel and Stunner were attempting to draw him to the gibbet.

“In the name of everything that is infernal, what do you mean by that, woman?” vociferated Briggs.

“To save you from the perpetration of a deadly sin,” she replied.

At that moment Althea Woodville, who had just landed below the garden, rushed forward, and, throwing herself at the feet of her guardian, begged the life of Philipson with all the eloquence of tears and passionate entreaties.

CHAPTER XI.

“BY heavens, Althea, death is less bitter to me than to see you thus,” cried Philipson.

Colonel Briggs silently looked from one to the other with an expression from which more was to be dreaded than from the most furious gestures rage can dictate; for what is so truly appalling as the smile of hatred? Althea's blood chilled as she knelt at his feet and raised her dark affrayed eyes to his; for in that smile she read the hopelessness of her suit and the malice that triumphed in her agonies, and only waited to add to those agonies the tortures of suspense before he mocked her misery with

words. All this she felt, yet continued to grasp his arm, in the silent energy of supplication, with such convulsive vehemence, that she unconsciously impressed the print of every nail upon his wrist in sanguine characters.

“Althea Woodville,” began Briggs — he then paused a moment and seemed to interrupt what he was about to say, and added: “I crave your pardon if I err in calling you by that name. Peradventure, it is yours no longer,” he continued, drawling out his words very slowly, and fixing a stony eye on the suppliant before him. “And ere I say anything further to you, it is absolutely necessary that I should be truly informed as to that particular.”

Small as was Althea’s hope of prevailing on his obdurate heart to spare the life of Philipson, yet she readily perceived how much even of that forlorn hope depended on her being able to answer truly that she

was still Althea Woodville; and a feeling of unspeakable satisfaction, even at that moment of anguish, pervaded her heart at the reflection that through her firmness in refusing to become his wife, Philipson might possibly be indebted for his preservation from death.

“*Still Althea Woodville!*” returned Briggs, laying a sarcastic emphasis on the words. “I deemed that you had exchanged the name for that of the gay young bachelor in whose house you have sojourned, lo! these fourteen days and—nights.”

The flush of indignant pride and offended delicacy restored the fugitive colour to the marble cheek of Althea as she briefly replied:

“Then you were mistaken.”

“I cry you mercy, my fair ward,” returned Briggs; “but I did not believe it possible that a damsel of your birth and breeding could have so far violated prudence and propriety as to live with a debauched young fellow as—

I care not, as we are so near of kin, to use the plain term before my hired servants, but will, for once, borrow a phrase from one of your tender romances, and say—as his *paramour*.”

Althea started from the ground at this insult and surveyed him with eyes that flashed fire through her fast-flowing tears. Briggs, although he felt himself master of her destiny, shrank back in confusion, awed and abashed by the glance she darted on him. Philipson, transported with an indignation that agitated every nerve in his frame with a tremor of passion, exclaimed:

“Why, my adored Althea, have you degraded both yourself and me by preferring a single supplication to a monster unworthy the name of anything but a roundhead? Let him do his worst. I defy him, and I swear unto you that neither racks, nor wheels, nor gibbets, could inflict a pang upon me equal to that which I have felt in hearing insults offered

to an angel like you, which I should have thought would have inspired every man present with the honest desire of bestowing condign punishment on him that offered them to helpless weeping beauty."

The demon of revenge once more scowled from under the lowering brow of Colonel Briggs as he muttered :

"Wherefore do I tarry for refinements in vengeance whilst he lives, and lives to brave me to my teeth ? Soldiers, fire !"

"Then we will die together !" shrieked Althea, throwing herself before Philipson and fearlessly enclosing that loved form in the sanctuary of her arms.

"Go, go, my loved one !" cried Philipson, gently striving to put her from him with his fettered hands, though his whole soul was, as it were, dissolved in tenderness by this unexpected proof of her devoted love ; and those eyes which but a moment before were blazing with a fury that made their very beauty

terrible, now melting with the softest emotions, wept tears of fondness over the pale pure cheek that rested on his bosom.

“Tear them apart!” cried Colonel Briggs, raging at this sight. “He shall die, but die alone.”

“Oh, let him live!” cried Althea, striving vainly at the same time to resist, with desperate struggles, the force that rent her from Philipson.

Then, flinging herself once more in the dust at the feet of Colonel Briggs, she cried:

“Oh, let him—let him live! and I will buy his life with half—nay, why do I talk of a part?—with the whole of my fair inheritance, to which, indeed, the manor of Calgarth is but a yeoman’s pittance. Ha, ha!” continued she, bursting into a wild, hysterical laugh, that smote more fearfully on the sense of those present than the most woeful cry could have done. “Ha, ha! I am rich—I am a wealthy heiress—and now I know the

value of my dowry ! Ha, ha ! I will buy him of you. Some men will barter their souls for love of gold—and you love it well, I trow.”

“ Yet I will not sell my revenge !” whispered he, in an emphatic low tone, “ which is at this time sweeter to me, Althea Woodville, than aught your wealth could purchase.”

“ Ay, but you are not aware of the large ransom I can offer you, or indeed you would grant my prayer,” cried Althea, grasping his garments with frantic vehemence.

“ Shall I tell you the terms on which I will accede to your wish ?” said he, in a deep under-voice, fixing, at the same time, a look upon her that curdled her blood.

“ Name them,” gasped Althea ; “ they must be hard, indeed, if I do not embrace them at such a moment.”

Colonel Briggs bent forward and whispered somewhat in her ear as she knelt before him, that caused her to utter a smothered cry,

which, though half choked by fear, resembled in sound the word "Never!"

"Soldiers," cried Colonel Briggs.

Althea caught his arm as he was in the act of raising it to enforce his order.

"Hold, hold!" she screamed, in a piercing voice. "I will—I will consent."

"Ay, but it must be to-night—this very night."

"To-night!" reiterated Althea, with an unmeaning look and eyes that grew glassy with their fearful expansion.

Strange, that in such a moment Merab's prediction should cross Althea's mind—yet so it was. Amid all the varied agonies, terrors, and heart-rending emotions with which that moment was fraught, she thought of the wild words of a vagrant female; nor were they without their influence in the reply she returned to the abhorrent proposal.

Her assent was given in the tone of a sleeper who labours, amidst the horrors of

the nightmare, to articulate a single word, which paralyzes the powers of utterance in coming forth, and expires in a smothered sob.

For a moment she remained immovable as a statue, with the pallid lips through which that fatal monosyllable had passed still apart, her rayless and dilated eyes gazing on vacancy with a glassy fixture. Saving that the anguish of her soul was fearfully reflected in the dark troubled mirrors of those expanded, melancholy orbs, the persons around her might have imagined that she felt no consciousness of her situation. Yet in that climax of agony—that cold pause of despair, when she appeared dead to the world and all it contained—her senses retained the power of impressing outward objects on her fancy, and, for the first time, she observed the bandages in which the head and arm of Colonel Briggs were enveloped, and remarked the ghastly expression of his countenance, his sunken features and livid complexion ; then

the ambiguous augury of Merab again flashed through her mind, especially those ominous words: "Think of me when you sit in loneliness by the dead that is now living;" and though the expression was, in the true spirit of all oracles, couched in those dubious terms, that left it uncertain to whom it might refer, and though it was far more likely to be fulfilled in the person of Philipson than in that of any one else, yet did Althea, true to nature, derive, from her own self-deception, hope and almost comfort, by applying the ambiguous oracle to Colonel Briggs.

Words from the lips that slowly part
Are flashed like lightning through the heart.

An instant was sufficient to realize the idea in Althea's mind, and the words had scarcely been uttered that signified her assent to Colonel Briggs's terms, when the pulseless trance of despair in which Althea was plunged, was broken by the voice of Philipson.

“ Althea !” he cried, “ Althea !” what are you doing? Remember, that I will not permit you to enter into any rash compact for the preservation of my life !”

“ Philipson, it is done !” she exclaimed, “ and you are safe.”

“ Done !” he repeated, in a tone of alarm. “ What is done, Althea ? Something more bitter to me than death, I know !”

“ Ah, Philipson ! my Philipson !” she replied, in a broken voice. “ Ask me not what I have given for thy life. *My* Philipson ! I call thee for the last time *mine* ! Surely thou art mine, for I have bought thee with a price ! Yet now we part for ever, for, oh !” she continued, repeating the concluding stanza of Merab’s song, which had fearfully, though unconsciously, impressed itself on her memory :

We’ve met in that sadness
No words can declare,
We must part in the madness
Of utter despair.

“ Althea !” exclaimed her lover ; “ I comprehend your meaning ; I guess the frightful sacrifice that has been proposed to you ; but I will not basely, poorly live on such terms ; besides, you are not your own—you are not free to act as you please. Look at the ring which encircles your finger, and remember your vows to me when it was placed there !”

“ Ha !” cried Althea, “ it is true.” And holding up her finger, and pointing to the ring, she said to Briggs, “ I am pledged to him !”

The countenance of Colonel Briggs lowered to a deeper gloom, as he glanced upon the ring, and replied :

“ His wife, as I at first supposed—then there is no remedy, and he shall die !”

“ Oh, no ! no !” shrieked Althea ! “ not his wife ; but his betrothed !”

“ Woman !” replied Briggs, “ I am not to be trifled with thus ; or lightly deceived by your yeas and nays. I do suspect that

you are the wife of that malignant, whose life hangs upon my breath."

Althea took the ring from her finger, and, with a trembling hand, offered to return it to Philipson.

"I will die a thousand deaths rather!" replied he, sternly.

Briggs fixed an eye of sullen inquiry on Althea. She pressed the ring passionately to her lips for a moment, then cast it on the ground at the feet of Briggs, who laughed with savage triumph as he trampled it in the dust.

"You will then fulfil your compact with me?" he said.

Althea bowed her head in silence; but a moment after replied with great quickness:

"Yes; but on condition that you put it out of your own power to play me false, by releasing Major Philipson instantly!"

"So you expect me to release my deadly

foe before you perform any part of the compact that ransoms him! and as a pledge for performance of the said compact I have, forsooth, the mighty security of a woman's promise!" returned Briggs.

"Have I not given you a proof of my sincerity?" said Althea, mournfully, pointing to the broken fragments of the ring.

"Pooh!" replied Briggs; "I am not a romantic boy to place any weight on such toys; nor do I feel inclined to relinquish the hostage till the treaty be fulfilled in every particular."

Althea gave an involuntary shudder.

"See I not how it is?" continued he. "Thou wouldst beguile me, woman, and I will not trust to thy empty promise!"

"Then," returned Althea, "there is an end of our treaty at once; for I know full well that, unless the conditions are performed before-hand, you will deceive me, and glory in your double revenge!"

“ Althea Woodville ! ask thyself, art thou prepared to see him die after thou hast refused to save him by a word of thine ? ”

“ Colonel Briggs, I am ready not only to promise, but to swear, that I will perform the terms of our compact at any place or time you may dictate, if you will fulfil your conditions upon the spot. Refuse to do this, and I will leave you to do your worst, and die Althea Woodville, leaving my lands and my quarrel as a double legacy to my legal heir and natural avenger, the valiant Sir Anthony Woodville.”

The complacency with which Althea always mentioned this kinsman of hers had more than once before this period given Briggs some degree of uneasiness ; because he suspected that she was more favourably inclined to him than to any other man, Philipson alone excepted ; and as Briggs placed very little weight on the worth or constancy of any woman's attachment, he

thought it possible that, after a few days passed in passionate sobs and tears over the untimely fate of her betrothed lover, she would forget her grief, and become in due time the wife of her cavalier cousin. He looked from Althea to Philipson, and from Philipson to Althea again, and prudently concluded that a marriage with an heiress possessed of estates that produced an annual revenue of twenty thousand pounds, was a far more lasting gratification than that of satisfying his revenge. In his own mind he weighed the pleasure of gazing his fill upon the pale and lifeless form of his detested foe, against the solid advantages of becoming master of the beloved object adored by that rival, together with her fair possessions, and found it wanting.

Turning to Althea, he said :

“ I will agree to accept your oath, and release the malignant Robert Philipson, on the conditions before named ; in acknowledg-

ment of which I charge you to place your hand in mine and solemnly promise to become my wife before all present !”

“ Althea Woodville ! I adjure you, by all our love, not to commit such an act of deliberate perjury for the preservation of a life which is worse than valueless if deprived of you !” exclaimed Philipson.

This passionate remonstrance was, however, unheeded ; and the moment the damp cold hand of Althea was placed in that of Colonel Briggs, in token of affiancement, the fetters were removed from the wrists and ankles of Philipson, and he was hastily conducted without the gates of Calgarth Hall, not being permitted to exchange even a mute farewell with his lost love, who remained motionless as a statue, her eyes still fixed on the spot where he last stood, till her hand fell from the relaxing grasp of her betrothed husband ; for Colonel Briggs, overcome by exhaustion, arising from his wounds, and the strife of

the angry feelings which had agitated him during the last two hours, suddenly fell to the ground in a deep swoon.

We will not dwell on the feelings of his affianced bride, as the general exclamation of "Good lack! Good lack! the colonel hath departed this life," met her ear, because they were certainly the very reverse from those which should be experienced by any woman on being suddenly apprized of the death of a man to whom she had just sworn to give her hand in marriage. We will not go so far as to say that Althea's heart thrilled with a sudden joy at the intelligence; but thus much may be confessed, that if she sustained a pang that bore any resemblance to sorrow or regret, it was when the bridegroom elect gave positive indications of returning animation.

CHAPTER XII.

INSTEAD of receiving the hand of the fair heiress of Lancefield Court that evening, at the marriage altar, Colonel Briggs was stretched on the bed of sickness, in consequence of the violent access of fever which attended the severe wounds he had received in his personal encounter with Philipson.

Before midnight, his life was pronounced to be in imminent danger by the surgeons and physicians that were summoned to his assistance from Carlisle and Kendal. Althea was again left to muse upon the probability of being speedily released from her hideous promise; even the prospect of the fulfilment

of that promise being delayed for an indefinite period was a relief to her ; and as she sat once more in the solitude of her gloomy chamber at Calgarth Hall, meditating upon the agitating scenes in which she had been lately engaged, and vainly endeavouring to exclude thoughts of Philipson, it is to be feared that a feeling nearly allied to satisfaction rushed over her heart, when she received the invariable answer of “worse,” that was ever and anon brought her as a bulletin of the state of her affianced husband.

Yet, when informed that he desired her attendance in his sick chamber, she acceded to the request without remonstrance, and shared with his sister in the night vigil, and performed kindly, and even soothingly, the offices of a nurse. When she sat by his restless pillow, and watched the agonized working of his strongly-marked features, the convulsive starts and throes of his gigantic frame, and the sultry flushes of

fever that occasionally darkened his swarthy complexion—and listened to his groans and laborious breathing — forgetting his insults, persecutions, and the ungenerous use he had made of his power, she in woman's true spirit reproached herself for having felt satisfaction at his danger. He was in that state in which frail mortality hangs as it were suspended by a hair over the unfathomable gulf of eternity. Vibrating between apathy and delirium, the fervent prayers which his sister offered up by his bedside fell unheeded on his ear. He did not attempt to pray for himself, and testified the greatest uneasiness at the various attempts made by his chaplain to arouse him to a sense of his extreme danger. That night of suffering passed away, and another, and another, succeeded, with very slight symptoms of amendment. His naturally bad temper became so intolerable, with the irritability of bodily pain, that he completely wearied every

one about him by his irascibility and moroseness. He expressed the greatest indignation if he were left to the attendance of hired nurses, and exacted such unremitting care from his sister and Althea, that the health of both began to suffer from their incessant confinement to his sick chamber.

Millicent Hill had unfortunately been left at the Long Holme in the hurry of Althea's departure with Merab, and Briggs had issued his commands that she should not be readmitted within the gates of Calgarth. He had even declared his determination of hanging the porter, if he presumed to disobey this peremptory order.

It was to no purpose that his sister represented the inconvenience the absence of her faithful attendant would inflict on Althea. He only struck his fist on the table, and angrily vociferated, "I have said it, and I mean what I say."

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was a fortnight before Colonel Briggs was finally pronounced out of danger, and as he rapidly approached convalescence Althea's spirits visibly declined at the gloomy prospect before her, of being ere long called upon to fulfil her marriage promise. Mrs. Kezia Briggs saw and pitied the hopeless despondence which oppressed the heart of her young kinswoman, robbed her eye of its brightness, and her step of the elasticity of youth. She pointed out these symptoms to her brother, and exerted all her reasoning powers in the endeavour of prevailing on him to release his unhappy ward from her engage-

ment, but in vain. To use Althea's own description of her feelings, it was like the barb of an arrow, constantly pressing upon her heart. A hideous phantom that haunted her sleeping and waking fancy, that she was ever labouring to banish from her thoughts—but which as incessantly returned.

More than once during the period of Briggs's illness, Philipson had renewed his attacks upon Calgarth Hall, with a degree of desperate fury that occasioned no slight alarm to its possessor, although it was now too strongly garrisoned, and provided every way for a siege, to allow the young cavalier the smallest chance of success in his daring attempts. Yet love and hatred alike urged him to fresh enterprises, which were little less than hopeless, though undertaken with a view of winning Althea from her present thralldom, or perishing in the endeavour. It was well known to him, that her promise to become the wife of Briggs was

not yet performed; and with the ardent romance of a lover who is assured of the unbounded affection of his beloved, he ventured to draw the sanguine conclusion, that it might yet be prevented. That Althea's high sense of honour and scrupulous adherence to her word, would not suffer her to have recourse to any of those ingenious little subterfuges (in which her sex are generally reputed to be versed) for evading the fulfilment of her vow, he knew her too well to hope. Yet, hopeless as he felt the endeavour, he was determined no effort of any kind on his part should be wanting to prevent so detested a sacrifice; and the following letter written in this spirit was delivered to Althea, even in the sick chamber of Colonel Briggs, a few days after one of Philipson's most desperate attacks on Calgarth Hall.

Althea trembled and turned pale at the sight of the superscription, but she neither chose to betray the person who dropped it

into her lap as he passed (one of the surgeons in attendance on Briggs), by refusing to receive it, nor when she was alone could she deny herself the sad satisfaction of making herself acquainted with the contents.

“ I am not yet the wife of Colonel Briggs,” she said, as she broke the seal, “ therefore I do him no wrong;” and with tearful emotion she proceeded to peruse this proof of the affection of the man she loved so tenderly.

“ Life of my life, my beautiful Althea, for mine you are in heart and soul, and if you will listen to the united pleadings of affection and the voice of reason, mine you shall be altogether, despite of an oath more rash than that of Jephtha when he sacrificed his daughter. Oh, Althea ! if oaths be indeed so sacred, think of your vow to be my wife, when I placed that ring upon your finger, which you afterwards, and in my very presence withal, cast on the earth as a thing of naught,

and permitted that villain Briggs to trample it to dust with brutal scorn. Yet deem not that I speak this reproachfully, for do I not know that it was in the depth and devotedness of thy love for me thou didst it? But oh, Althea, since thou art impelled by stern destiny to break a solemn vow, whichever course thou dost pursue, hear me plead for the performance of thy prior promise; and if breaking a vow so cruelly extorted from thee, as that was whereby thou didst save my life, be a crime worthy of the name of perjury, think, oh, think, my Althea, what accumulated sin it will be to swear to love a man who is abhorred, to honour where you despise, and to obey where obedience must be a crime, to promise to forsake all others, and cleave to him alone, when thy heart is breaking with love for me! Oh, then, Althea, destroy not our mutual happiness here and hereafter by such a deed, but rather fly from Calgarth, and avoid a crime which will be

otherwise forced upon thee. Spite of all perils, I am often near thee ; and if you will, by hanging a white scarf on the old willow which overhangs the lake, give me a hope that you will embrace the first opportunity which may offer of quitting your present abode, I will engage that such opportunity shall not be long wanting.

“ Farewell, my Althea, my affianced wife. Remember that thou art mine by pre-contract, and that no marriage with another can be legal in the sight of God or man till the heart and hand of Robert Philipson are cold in the grave, and then, and then only, wilt thou be resigned to the arms of another by him who is through every peril and in life and death thine own.

“ R. P.”

Althea was touched even to agony by the ardour and tenderness of the attachment that pervaded every line she read, yet alarmed

beyond description by the hint thrown out, that Philipson was at times hovering near a spot so full of peril. She resolved to put an end at once to every hope he might entertain of inducing her to break a vow that her conscience would not suffer her to violate. She hurried with trembling steps into the garden, and hastening to the edge of the lake, she took a black crape scarf from her neck and hung it upon the prescribed willow, as a symbol to her lover that all hope must by them both be considered as extinguished for ever.

Her eyes filled with tears as she raised them to the full-orbed moon, and thought how different were her emotions when that fair planet shone upon her evening walks with Philipson at the Long Holme.

One short month only had passed since that halcyon period, yet it had been marked with events that had spread the darkness of utter desolation over her young heart, and

clouded the prospect of the residue of her days with a gloom impervious to a single ray of hope. She lingered a moment by the lake side to take a farewell glance at a spot consecrated by remembrances, whose thrilling sweetness appeared only to return upon her soul as an aggravation of her present misery. How sweetly the moonbeams slept on the bosom of the imperial lake, and gilded the Long Holme, and its little cluster of dependent islets. The very beauty of the scenery, and the breathless tranquillity of the night, increased the bitterness of Althea's feelings, and in the anguish of soul she exclaimed, in the words of the royal psalmist :

“ Oh that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away and be at rest.”

“ Find thy rest here, mine only beloved one !” cried a well-known voice ; and before she could realize to herself his presence, Philipson had snatched her to his bosom.

“ Alas ! alas !” she said, “ that the last

drop of bitterness should be infused into mine already over-brimming cup of grief by another meeting with thee."

"Is it, indeed, Althea Woodville, my own Althea, that utters words like these?" replied Philipson, reproachfully, yet fondly.

"No, Philipson," replied she, in a mournful voice, "it is not thy Althea who thus answers thee, but it is that most wretched Althea who is the affianced bride of another, and who in the climax of her despair bids thee leave her now and for ever."

"Let me perish if I do," said Philipson, drawing her still closer to his heart. "Althea, my life! my love! what infatuation is this? Why will you destroy us both, when happiness is within our reach, if you only choose to take it?"

"No, no, my lost love," replied Althea, "the oath that I swore to him that has destroyed our happiness in this world, was couched in too awful terms of solemn adjuration to allow

me to break it so lightly. I am too deeply pledged to him to listen to thy fatally-beloved voice thus rashly, for I have invoked dreadful wishes on my own soul if I break my vow. Why, oh, why does love unite those whom destiny divides for ever? And thou, cruel destiny! wherefore dost thou divide those whom love unites in ties so firm and fond," she added, quoting unconsciously the impassioned words of the Italian poet.*

"Destiny does not, cannot divide those who have resolution enough to make their own destiny. Our fates are in your hands. Oh, let not mistaken honour separate us!" exclaimed Philipson.

"Alas," returned Althea, "it needed not this impassioned pleading to increase the agony of my breaking heart. Every moment that I see and hear you adds bitterness to the thought that you are lost to me for ever."

"It is not so, Althea," replied Philipson.

* Guarini.

“ You may indeed tear yourself from me, and resign that hand to another which was vowed to me alone, but you cannot divorce my heart from yours, for while life remains that heart will continue indivisibly your own.”

Althea wept.

“ It is pride,” continued Philipson, “ cruel pride, that shuts your heart against my suit.”

“ How, Philipson—pride ?”

“ Yes, pride, Althea ; you cannot brook that Briggs should call you forsworn, and for that cause you doom me to the gulf of despair.”

“ Cruel Philipson ! how wilfully do you mistake my feelings. How uselessly do you increase the anguish of my heart,” said Althea, weeping more passionately than before.”

“ Wretch that I am !” cried Philipson, throwing himself at her feet. “ It is for my sake that you have involved yourself in this hideous destiny, yet I selfishly think only of

mine own woe. Forgive my madness, Althea, yet hear me urge but one word more."

"Oh no, no more; you may break my heart, but cannot shake the conviction I feel that my portion is despair in the next world as well as in this, if I perform not what I have so awfully sworn to do, unless, indeed, he that extorted the oath could be prevailed on to release me from it. You shake your head. Alas! you know the obduracy of that heart as well as I do. Here must our loves end; they would urge on guilt if we permitted ourselves to indulge in further thoughts of each other. Here on this spot we part, and part for ever."

"Not so, indeed, Althea, unless Briggs is immortal or invulnerable," returned Philipson, grasping the hilt of his sword, with a terrible look.

"Hush, Philipson, cherish no deadly thoughts; remember he gave you your life," said Althea, laying her hand on his arm.

“Gave me my life!” repeated Philipson, fiercely, “he did—but on what terms? Add not fuel to the flame that burns within my heart, Althea, by saying aught to deter me from what is not revenge but justice. A moment, I trust, will yet be mine——”

“Oh, do not,” interrupted Althea, “sacrifice, in pursuance of a private enmity, your public duties. Your loyalty to your suffering monarch requires that the best energies of your mind should be devoted to his cause.”

“Do you suppose, then, Althea, that I forget Briggs is a traitor? No, no, believe me, that circumstance is added to the deep account of the other villanies for which he owes me a fearful reckoning.”

“Think not of him, Philipson, he is beneath your vengeance. Seek a wider and more glorious field for the exercise of your daring valour. I would say, if I might venture to advise, bid a long, a last farewell to scenes where deeds of high emprise are

poorly wasted. I will not add, forget that we ever met, for I know too well that the wound long aches after it has ceased to bleed."

"Althea, it is useless to counsel me thus. You may indeed tear yourself from me, but you cannot rule the frenzy of my love and my despair. I will not breathe any air but that which you breathe. I will not exist in any spot where you have not been."

"Philipson, dearest Philipson, all this frantic expression of ungoverned passion increases the anguish that already swells my heart, even nigh to breaking. I can endure this woe no longer, and must perforce tear myself from you."

"So soon, Althea, and this our last interview?"

"It has only been too fatally prolonged. I shall be missed, and if we are found together——"

"What then, Althea? I am reckless of all

that can befall me; and for you—can that man condemn you to a darker destiny than that of becoming his wife? Why then shorten the last moments, dearly sad as they are, which are yet ours?”

“Better they were past,” replied Althea, weeping hopelessly. “Believe me, we are but adding to the bitterness of our own woe by every word we now exchange. Mine,” she continued, “is the harder fate, for I shall be doomed not only to be rent from thee, but to spend my life as the yokefellow of a being who is, I will hope, for the sake of human nature, without a parallel.”

“Althea, that destiny you embrace when you have the alternative of flying with me.”

“No, Philipson, it cannot be; you will not, I know, force me once more to act against my conscience. Bereft of every hope in this world, let me have the consolation of looking forward to a better, and take here my last, long, sad farewell.”

Subdued by this appeal her lover unclasped the arm he had tenaciously wound around her, and foregoing the intention he had throughout the whole scene secretly cherished in his heart, of once more carrying her by force from Calgarth, he turned from her, and departed without a word, but with a burst of sorrow that inflicted fresh anguish on the heart of Althea.

“There can be no pang in death like this,” she said, as she tore herself from the spot, after listening to the dashing of his parting oars, that sounded like the knell of every joy which remained to her on earth.

CHAPTER XIV.

COLONEL BRIGGS slowly but surely recovered from his wounds ; and as he regained his health his sullen humour seemed to increase.

Althea was wont to pass the chief of her time in the solitude of her own apartment, avoiding the penance of his society as much as possible in their relative situations, and when she was obliged to meet him, as at meals, she seldom looked up, and never spoke ; in fact, she strove as much as possible to evade his notice, for whenever he addressed her, she dreaded lest it should be to appoint a time for their detested nuptials ; and each day that passed over, without her

promise being claimed, appeared to her like a short reprieve from the execution of a sentence more horrible than that of a death of torture. Yet the sword was still suspended over her head by a single hair, and the long apprehended moment at length arrived when Colonel Briggs uttered the dreadful words :

“ Althea Woodville, meet me in the chapel by eight o’ the clock to-morrow morn, for that is the time and place I appoint for our marriage.”

Her long anticipation of this fatal sentence had not prepared Althea to hear it with a whit the more resignation, and she stared upon him with a look of such unequivocal surprise and consternation as provoked him more than the most insulting rejoinder could have done. After a moment’s pause, finding that she offered neither assent nor dissent, he continued, in a louder and more grating key :

“ You have not forgotten your promise, Althea Woodville ?”

“Forgotten it!” shrieked Althea, “oh, no, no, no! Believe me, I have not been so happy as to do that, even for a single moment. Here, here it has sat,” she added, pressing her clasped hands on her heart, “a dead weight by night and by day, haunting me when sleeping, and proving a very nightmare to my waking thoughts.”

“No matter, I call upon you to fulfil it to-morrow morning at the hour I have named.”

A cold dew rose on Althea's death-like brow as she met the stony, unrelenting eye of the man who claimed her as his wife:

“Will you not grant me the least respite?” she faltered out.

“Not an hour—not a moment. I have deferred it too long already; and were I weak enough to delay it yet further in indulgence to your whims—say for a day, a week, or a month—could you, on your conscience, answer that you would yield a more cheer-

ful compliance at the expiration of such period?"

"I am not sure that I should," responded Althea, with more candour, perhaps, than policy.

"I know you would not; for, let me ask you, are you now less reluctant to redeem your pledge than you were on the day you gave it?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Althea, with a general shudder. "I think, indeed, I never contemplated the idea of becoming your wife with half the horror that I do at this moment."

"You are exceedingly obliging in your acknowledgments, madam."

"This is not a time for disguise. I should not be justified to mine own conscience were you to marry me in ignorance of my sentiments towards you."

"You may spare yourself the trouble of wasting so many bitter words, as I see you are

preparing to array against me, Althea Woodville. I can guess your sentiments passing well."

"Oh, no, no!" replied Althea, quickly, "you cannot form the slightest idea of the loathing with which I at all times look upon you; but when I imagine you in the character of a husband—and, oh heavens! *my* husband—I sicken with horror no language can express."

"Althea Woodville, all this is foolish, and may aggravate me to a terrible retaliation, but it will not alter my determination."

"Yet pause ere you ensure your own misery by dragging a despairing victim to the altar—a bride whose love for another is only equalled by her hatred of you."

"Tarry until I ask you for your love before you profess your hatred, Althea Woodville. You have promised to marry me, and that sufficeth."

"Yet, before you exact that dreadful com-

pliance, hear me warn you that I can, and will, make you rue the hour that ever yoked you with so unfitting a mate as Althea Woodville."

"You will do nothing against your conscience, so I rest easy on that head," replied Briggs.

"No ? then be prepared to hear me speak the truth at the altar of God. Instead of perjuring myself by vainly repeating the solemn promise to love, honour, and obey you, I must, in obedience to the dictates of conscience, protest my hatred and scorn."

"Oh, you may say what you list. No guests will be bidden to the marriage, in order to chronicle the last of your maiden follies ; but it will be your wisest plan, I trow, to avoid offering useless and needless provocation to one who is master of your fate."

"Nay, I am reckless of all consequences ; and if I live, it will be with the view of ren-

dering you as very a wretch as I shall be myself."

"I am willing to encounter all such risks, my fair bride elect. Many a shrew has before now been tamed into a quiet, loving, and dutiful wife, and I have no doubt of reducing you to all reasonable and dutiful discreteness of behaviour as Mistress Briggs, so that you shall be as a crown of glory to mine head."

Althea shuddered, and turned away with a look of unutterable disgust. And Briggs continued:

"You have been heretofore vain of your outward comeliness, and I will not deny that you are a fair woman to look upon; but what says the proverb on the subject of a beautiful woman without discretion? And now, touching the matter of our marriage. I pretend not to dictate your wedding garment; yet methinks black, which seems to be your customary tiring, would ill beseem a bridal."

“Black is the emblem of my destiny as your bride, and therefore the more fitting array for such espousals as ours. My attire will be that mournful suit of bombax and crape I wore the day of my dear father’s burial. Oh! could he see this day.” She burst into a passion of tears, which Briggs, as usual, beheld with the most stoical apathy.

After a few moments of bitter weeping, she took her handkerchief from her eyes, and said :

“I steadfastly believe that our antipathies are mutual, which conviction, and the assurance that avarice alone urges you to insist upon so disproportionate a union, leads me to hope that you can be prevailed upon to accept the inheritance instead of the heiress.”

“Do you really surmise me to be such a changeling idiot as to listen to such folly? You are a minor, and may never be possessed of the inheritance you are so eager to barter for your own sweet self. Perhaps you are

not so far from the truth in your supposition that there is no love lost between us two. So much the better for me ; for were I weak enough to entertain a passion for you, it would be in your power to torment me at pleasure. As it is, your good or ill will are fortunately matters of perfect indifference to me."

"Then you will be the gainer by my proposal of giving you the lands without the incumbrance of a wife who cannot make you otherwise than a very miserable man."

"I will give you all due credit for doing your best to make your threat good, my fair one ; and, in fact, I know no female possessed of greater capabilities in that way than yourself. Nevertheless, as I said before, I am not to be deterred from claiming the fulfilment of your promise by any fears for the future ; and as for taking your inheritance without yourself, it is a thing which my conscience, as your guardian, will not permit

me to do. Therefore, see that you meet me, without excuse or subterfuge, in the chapel to-morrow morning, at the appointed hour. You have," he continued, "enjoyed the rare satisfaction of telling me your mind *in toto*, and, no doubt, woman-like, you feel yourself much the better for it; and, in truth, it was a much more sensible proceeding than a display of faintings and hysterics. I have nearly broke you of those follies, and I trust in time to make you a reasonable, pious, and even covenanting spouse——"

More he would have said, but Althea, darting a look of ineffable scorn upon him, quitted the room, leaving him in the midst of his speech.

CHAPTER XV.

THUS far an indignant and lofty spirit had supported Althea, but when alone, in the gloomy solitude of her chamber, the real moment of trial came. Reflections on the past, the present, and the dreaded future, pressed upon her mind, and agitated her almost to madness. In the paroxysms of her anguish, she dashed herself on the floor, and rent her glossy ringlets, and struck her brow with the demeanour of a maniac. But this frantic violence was foreign to her temper and character; it speedily subsided into a state of quiescence, which proceeded neither from the exertions of reason nor the soothing

influence of religion, but from utter bodily exhaustion. She glanced round the apartment in search of she knew not what; fortunately, no instrument of destruction met her eyes. She gazed upon the silent waters of the lake that flowed within view of her windows, and a dreadful thought intruded upon her soul. It was a moment in which the tempter's power was strong upon her. She rose softly from the ground, and approached the window with steps as stealthy as if she feared her purpose might be guessed and prevented. A horrible composure had succeeded to the tumultuous agonies that had so lately agitated her.

“There is at least one way of escape from the performance of my vow,” she whispered to herself; “and hard as it is to die in the morning of my days—loving, and loved, too!—yet it is to be preferred to life-long misery with him, the cold-hearted, mocking fiend.”

She paused, and listened; all sounds had

died away in the mansion, save the ticking of the great clock at the stair-head. Midnight was long past, and presently the deep, single stroke smote her ear, which proclaimed the first hour of the day appointed for her to become the wife of Colonel Briggs. She started up, cast her cloak hastily about her, and, unclosing her chamber door with a noiseless hand, stole softly forth. She knew there was a small private stair concealed behind the carved oak panelling, on the left hand of the fire-place, in the state drawing-room, which led to a postern door below, and thither she now bent her way.

On entering the large gloomy apartment, of which the feeble glimmering of the lamp she carried in her hand only served to render the darkness visible, strange and undefined images of terror floated over her brain. She thought of the hideous and unaccountable appearances with which the mansion was haunted till her heart seemed to collapse, and

she stood for a moment irresolute whether to recede or advance; but, when she looked back, she fancied a tall, shadowy form stood in the doorway through which she had just passed. She hurried forward, and sliding back the panel that masked the secret stair, which she had accidentally discovered not many days before, she hastily descended it. At the foot there was a dark narrow passage, which she tremblingly pursued till she reached the postern, where she was startled by perceiving a dark figure stretched upon the ground before it.

Suppressing, with a powerful effort, the cry that was ready to burst from her lips, she summoned sufficient courage to examine this object by the light of her lamp, and discovered, by the tokens of a belted buff coat, a firelock and pike, that it was one of the soldiers of the garrison acting as sentinel, but slumbering on his post. She hesitated for a moment. There was scarcely room for

her to step between his head and the wall, yet she desperately hazarded that step, and passed without rousing him from his heavy slumbers. Next, with a cautious, but daring hand, she unfastened bolt, chain, and bar, unclosed the door, and, stepping abroad, stood free and unquestioned beneath the starry vault of night. Still she was impressed with an idea that she was followed, which made her quicken her stealthy pace, giving, at the same time, ever and anon a frightened glance over her shoulder; but the dark funereal avenue of yew trees, cut into conical or pyramidal forms, or the uncouth proportions of the human figure, thrown into bold relief by the intense shadows of night, and looking like a gigantic array of unearthly race, alone met her gaze.

Her eyes, however, now grown familiar with the gloom, began to acquire the power of distinguishing objects, and her start was audible when she observed a group of silent,

motionless figures assembled in a circle full in her path. Their attitudes were various, fantastic, and forcible—some with raised and others with extended arms; yet none moved or spoke, and she was conscious of no sound save the rustling of the leaves, the murmur of the rushing Troutbeck, and the agitated pulsations of her own breast. She paused and fixed her eyes fearfully on this strange assemblage, and then perceived another form, apparently that of a female, lying face downwards on the grass—motionless like the rest. Was it an obsequy that this appalling group were met to celebrate; or had a midnight murder been committed? Althea stood irresolute whether to conceal herself or fly; doubtful, if she looked upon beings of this world, or rather whether the whole were not a phantasm, conjured up by the active agency of her own busy and highly-excited imagination; when, from the position of a particular tree near the

spot, she suddenly recalled to her memory that the group which had so much startled her were the statues round a ruined fountain, which had long ceased to play. One of them she well remembered had fallen from its base, and was lying on the turf at some little distance from the rest, and altogether had, in the gloom and shadows of night, taken the startling appearance which had for some moments worked so powerfully on her fancy. Again she moved hastily onward, and not a whit re-assured by the conviction of the groundlessness of her late terror, the former idea returned to her mind with redoubled force that her steps were tracked by some—at times visible, and at times invisible—object. Once she thought her cloak was plucked by an unseen hand from behind as she entered the garden. By the time she arrived at the edge of the lake, she was—if not in an actual state of frenzy—yet by no means in a sane or reasonable state of mind. The instinctive

love of life is, however, powerful even in those who have bidden a long adieu to hope, and was felt by her at that moment when the despair of her heart had cast the gloomy shadows of delirium over her brain, and feverish fires were throbbing in every pulse throughout her frame. She paused, oppressed with that trembling awe with which frail mortality shrinks back from passing the unknown limits that divide finite existence and infinite eternity. She looked upon the dark expanse of waters in whose cold bosom she was about to seek refuge from the completion of her marriage contract; she looked towards the little cluster of isles, the home of her beloved; and although her eyes might not discern them through the mists of night, she, as it were, sent her whole soul thitherward in a mute farewell. She thought of his anguish when the news of her sad fate should reach him, and overcome by the idea of his grief, the fever-dried fountains of her hot and

swollen lids once more dissolved in tears, and her softened heart half changed its purpose. But then arose before her the agonizing anticipation of those frightful nuptials to which she had been summoned, and from which there would be no escape but in death ; and with these thoughts the frenzy of her soul returned.

“It is but a plunge !” she gloomily whispered to herself, as her eyes once more rested upon the dark mirror that lay before her,—yet she drew back and shuddered. “What mean these weak misgivings, and these mysterious clingings to a life that is worse than worthless to me, whose only prospect is a lingering passage to the grave by means of protracted tortures ? Shall I, indeed, return and link my hand with that of the detested one ? Then might he truly enjoy his base triumph over me, and exult in his revenge over my noble Philipson. Shall he do this ? No ; death dissolves all human con-

tracts. Let him seek and claim his bride from the deep waters of Windermere to-morrow, and enjoy his triumph if he will!”

She cast herself forward, to take the fearful plunge, as she concluded—that plunge which was to precipitate her into the unfathomable gulf of eternity, and that, too, without the preparation of a single deprecating prayer to Him into whose awful presence she was about to rush uncalled. Another moment and all would have been over; but in this critical instant, when her desperation had reached its climax, her garments were suddenly and firmly grasped from behind, by some unseen witness of her intention, and a stern voice—yet more in sorrow than in anger—exclaimed:

“Unhappy girl! and are you indeed about to exchange the transitory evils of fleeting time for a woeful and endless hereafter?”

Althea, though still a prisoner in the hold of a strong and almost masculine hand, turned

round at these words, and became immediately aware that the dark and mysterious figure which, in spite of the delusions of delirious fancy she had been conscious, had tracked her steps almost from the moment of quitting her own apartment to this spot, was Kezia Briggs, who had thus happily interposed between her and her own fatal despair, and now, yielding to an unwonted softness, drew the trembling girl to her bosom and wept over her with the passionate affection of a fond mother who beholds the daughter of her love suddenly restored to her arms when she had already numbered her with the dead.

This unexpected tenderness, this gush of tears, from a person of the unbending mind and stern manners of Mrs. Kezia Briggs, touched Althea's heart more feelingly than aught beside could have done. So truly irresistible is the unlooked-for sympathy of one whom we have been accustomed to regard with awe, and treat with reserve. Althea, as

might be expected, gave way to similar softness, the wild desperation of her mind melted into tender feelings, and throwing her arms about her relative she wept almost to suffocation. Mrs. Kezia was too much moved by her distress to reproach with severity her sinful attempt at self-destruction. She had witnessed the unrestrained anguish of her soul, and much as her principles led her to condemn such unchecked passion—her compassion exceeded her condemnation.

“Alas ! mistaken and erring one,” she cried, “but for my timely intervention thou hadst ere this stood in the presence of thy God, to render account to him of thy impious daring.”

Althea shuddered, and clung yet closer to the bosom of her preserver.

“Thou art now sensible, my child, I trust, of the awfulness of the gulf into which thou wert about to precipitate thyself; and think, oh think, Althea, of the singular providence

that ordained my chamber door to be ajar for the first time in my recollection, and myself, a notable sound sleeper, keeping an unwonted vigil at the moment when you glided along the gallery with that hurried, yet stealthy, step that might well make an observer suspect your purpose was a perilous one, yet when I arose and, hastily donning my clothes, followed unseen, at a distance, I had not the most remote idea that the divine light of inward grace had been so utterly withdrawn, as to leave you wholly to the desperation and wickedness of your own sinful nature and the power of the tempter."

"Yet," rejoined Althea, "you were fully aware of the despair into which I was plunged by your brother's communication made to me previously to my retiring to rest."

"No; I was only sensible of the many and angry words, equally to be condemned in both, that passed between ye on the occasion. I witnessed a fearful outpouring of wrath and

manifestation of hatred and revenge on either side, which led on yours to the frightful consequences which a hairbreadth intervention of mine, through the mercy of God, was the means of preventing. The eternal perdition of mortal body and immortal soul were audaciously perilled by your act of revenge to an erring fellow-creature, who, believe me, Althea, would have been callous to the self-sacrifice you dared to venture ; the only persons on whom it would have inflicted the anguish you designed for him would have been myself and Robert Philipson."

Althea was again moved to floods of tears, and whispered in a voice scarcely audible from strong emotion :

"I knew not, indeed, that you would have felt a pang for me. I did not think ——"

"That with all your faults and follies—and truly they are not a few—I loved my wrong-headed little cousin better, indeed, than the elect of God should have loved the creature of

sin and vanity. Alas, I knew not how dearly till I saw you on the brink of everlasting perdition. Let us now in, for the morn is chill, and the damps from the lake are most pernicious at this hour, and let us from the very depths of our hearts thank our heavenly Father that you are at this moment leaning on my bosom instead of lifting up your eyes in torment."

Althea shuddered convulsively, and again her fast-falling tears wetted the bosom of her kinswoman, who once more kissed her and soothed her with words of kindness and comfort. They returned to the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

JOTHAM BRAMWELL, the sentinel, had not yet finished his nap when Althea and her kinswoman repassed the portal. After Mrs. Kezia had promptly replaced the fastenings, she thought it needful to awaken the sleeper. Striking him smartly with her foot, she exclaimed :

“I tell thee, the master of that servant shall come in an hour when he thinketh not.”

The sentinel started from the ground in sudden alarm, and laid hands upon his firelock ; but when he recognised Mrs. Kezia, he fell on his knees and began to howl forth a most pathetic petition for mercy, as he well knew

his life would pay the forfeit were his colonel informed that he had slept on his post.

“Fellow!” cried Mrs. Kezia, “it hath been well said in the volume of the Book, ‘I will have mercy and not sacrifice.’ Use prayer with thy future watching, so shalt thou be delivered from the overtakings of sleep. I wot there are those who yield to less innocent temptations among the best of us; but thou art in a post of trust, therefore I counsel thee to take heed, lest thou art caught slumbering by harsher witnesses than we be.”

She then conducted Althea past the sentinel, and led her as she was—with her dishevelled hair spread in wild disorder, partly over her death-pale features, and partly over her disarranged dress—at once into the chamber of Colonel Briggs, and taking the lamp from the table by his bedside, she unshaded it, and drawing back his curtains, she pointed to Althea, and exclaimed in a stern tone:

“Bartholomew Briggs, wake and behold thy work !”

Colonel Briggs, thus suddenly aroused from a perturbed slumber, reared his gaunt form in the bed with a stare of horror, and grasping the naked broad-sword, that lay on the coverlet beside him, cried :

“In the name of the Trinity, avoid !”

Then, recognising his sister, he added :

“How now, sister Kezia, what brings you hitherward at this hour, and in this guise ?”

“I came to show you your victim, for it is meet you should look upon her as she is,” replied his sister.

He gazed with a troubled and inquiring stare upon the drooping form of Althea, whose head had sunk in temporary unconsciousness on the shoulder of his sister. Her half-closed eyes were fixed and rayless, giving to her mournful and marble-tinted features a more appalling expression than if they had been wholly veiled beneath their lids. Alto-

gether she was so changed from the beautiful high-spirited creature who, but a few brief hours before, had with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks defied him in his plenitude of power—fearlessly assailed him with the bright weapons of her wit, with the keenness of her sarcasms, and the intrepid avowal of her hatred and contempt, that scarcely could he believe she was the same person, till his sister put back the long dark locks that shaded her finely-marked brow, and then, struck with the death-like languor of her appearance, he exclaimed :

“What have you brought her hither for? I have not killed her! And you have yourself more the appearance of a spectre than of a living and reasonable tabernacle of flesh and blood! Sure never man was tormented by women as I am! By day I am beset with the virulence of their tongues, and at night they invade the privacy of my chamber, and dispel my slumbers by withdrawing my cur-

tains and glaring upon me with death-setting eyes."

"Such as she is, you have made her," replied his sister, "and it is meet and fitting that you behold your work."

"Woman, 'tis false! I have not murdered her," said Briggs, regarding Althea with a look of overwhelming consternation. "You cannot say I did?"

"Far worse have you done than even raising your hand against her life! You have mercilessly driven her to that sinful state of desperation that she has been moved by the evil one to the dreadful purpose of shortening her appointed days in the morning of her existence."

"How? what?" stammered Briggs, in his terror. "Laid hands on herself? Woman, how durst you leave any instrument of destruction in her way?"

"Bartholomew — brother," replied Mrs. Kezia, sternly, "and as a Christian woman,

I with difficulty refrain from calling thee by a harsher name—a name that thou dost in truth deserve—why dost thou basely and injuriously essay to cast on me the blame, due to thyself alone, of driving a fellow-creature to despair, and that creature the orphan of thy deceased aunt, who dreamed not, when she commended her only child to thy care, that thus thou shouldst fulfil the duties of a guardian.”

“Cease your volley of interminable words,” cried Briggs, angrily, “and tell me what she hath done to herself. Methinks she still breathes?”

Mrs. Kezia then briefly related the particulars of Althea’s late rash attempt, commenting at the same time, in the severest terms, on her brother’s conduct, and imploring him for the sake of honour, humanity, decency, and religion, to release Althea from an engagement extorted from her under such cruel circumstances, and which pressed so heavily on her spirit.

“The devil take me if I do!” growled Briggs. “No, no! I am proof against all the tricks and mummeries of your crocodile sex to cheat me out of my rights. So away with ye both! Stay! one word more. Prythee, how came the watch to let you pass so lightly, mine honoured sister?”

“The frailness of the flesh had prevailed over his vigilance, and he slumbered, brother, at the time of our passing his ward.”

“Slumbered on his post! A trusty sentinel, I trow; but by the covenant of grace he shall hang for it at sunrise!”

“Unmerciful man of blood, how heavily you would punish the slightest departure from duty in a hireling, yet can yourself unblushingly sin against God and the inward witness of your own conscience!” returned his sister. “But of this be assured, your man shan’t hang, for I won’t witness against him.”

“Get to bed with you, then, and look to that perverse vessel of self-willed wayward-

ness — that malignant in petticoats, who hangeth on your arm with all the helpless innocence of a babe in her face, but with the stubborn fierceness of a tigress in that unwashed sanctuary, her heart! See that she be laid warmly, and made to swallow one of your possets. And mark me, I will not have her left alone till she is my wedded wife.”

“Your wedded wife, Bartholomew! out upon your cruelty and selfishness! Consider for one moment how would it beseem a covenanter of your grave years and habits to hang such a dainty toy as this about your grim neck? To what could such ill-assorted ’spousals tend but to your own misery and mayhap dishonour? for her soul doteth even unto idolatry upon another, and she is prone to follow her impulses of will recklessly and desperately.”

“Fash your head about your own business, sister, and let it not ponder on matters of

mine. I suppose that I, who have been an approved commander of such stuff as iron-clad men, shall find small difficulty in bending a silly girl to my will."

"Hitherto you have succeeded indifferently in the attempt, brother," retorted the worthy spinster, drily, as she withdrew Althea from the room.

The night was now far spent, and though Althea, exhausted by her late vehement emotions, did sink into a troubled state of slumber, repose was far from her. Mrs. Kezia Briggs sat by her bedside, watching her with anxious interest, as her bosom heaved and fluttered with excessive agitation, even in sleep, whilst the large tears stole from beneath the dark fringes of her snowy lids, and chased each other over her tintless cheek, till the pillow on which it rested was steeped with those sad waters. Mrs. Kezia took her feverish hand in hers, gently to rouse her from her sorrowful dream. Althea started,

and drew it back with a piercing shriek, muttering afterwards in a low inward voice :

“ Not yet—not yet ! Save me from him, Philipson, beloved Philipson ! ”

Then unclosing her eyes, she raised her head, gazed with a troubled look upon Mrs. Kezia for a moment, and sank back upon her pillow in a state of stupor rather than sleep.

At daybreak, just as Althea had passed into a more refreshing slumber, she and all in the house were roused by a sharp bugle blast wound before the drawbridge, which was immediately lowered, and presently the stir of business was manifest throughout the mansion. Althea pressed her hands to her throbbing temples, as if disturbed by the noise, but asked no questions. Anon the heavy clank and creaking of Briggs's military boots audibly announced his approach to the chamber-door. With no other ceremonial than a rap with his dagger-hilt, he opened it, and strode in.

Althea clung to Mrs. Kezia with a smothered cry.

“ Brother, what may be the meaning of this unmannered intrusion ?” asked his sister, turning about with a stern air.

“ I have come to say that Althea Woodville must prepare her for the fulfilment of her vow to me an hour earlier than I named last night,” said the colonel.

“ It is impossible ; and if I could be surprised at any instance of brutality on your part, brother, I should stand amazed at your conduct in thrusting yourself into this chamber.”

“ Sister, it was matter of urgency that impelled me to do so. A summons having been sent me to join the brigade of Sir William Waller immediately ; therefore, as I must needs be in marching array by ten of the clock, my espousals will necessarily take place at an earlier hour than I fixed last night. It is my pleasure that the bride be immediately

dressed—I care not in what array, so that she be not in widows' weeds, in which, I dare swear, her perversity would move her to attire herself, out of pure contradiction and despitefulness of temper, if she were permitted to use her own discretion."

"Spare yourself the trouble of dictating her bridal dress," replied his sister, for she is too ill to raise her head from her pillow."

"Away with your womanish devices!" rejoined Briggs. "I shall not be made their dupe. Think you that I am to give up my settled purpose because a puling chit puts finger to her eye and cries, 'La, me! I have the headache,' or it may be a fit of vapours, or megrims, and a superannuated spinster is fool enough to echo her whims?"

"Alack, poor brother, whose years do so nearly approach unto the era of superannuation, at which thou considerest I have already arrived, and yet art lunatically bent on taking a wife in her nonage, I needs must pity thee!"

said Mrs. Kezia, drily. “ However, in respect to Althea Woodville’s approaching the altar, whether late or early this morning, the thing is out of the question ; and if you believe not my word, take the evidence of your own eyes.”

She withdrew the coverlid under which Althea had shrouded her face, and Briggs did indeed see enough of alarming indisposition indicated there to convince even his unfeeling nature that she was in no condition to complete the sacrifice to which, for the sake of Philipson, she had devoted herself. He marked the alternate hectics and fading of her complexion, the difficulty of her respiration, the languor of her features, and the restless wandering of her eyes, and began for the first time to entertain an idea that the flower he had so rudely shaken would never be gathered to adorn his bosom.

“ She is too ill to be hurried or removed,” said Mrs. Kezia, in reply to his avowed inten-

tion of making them both the companions of his journey, and of marrying Althea as soon as she was recovered.

“Change of air will be medicine and health to her,” observed Briggs.

“It must be with different company and with other prospects then,” said his sister.

“A plague upon all women, old or young!” growled he in reply; and with this obliging farewell, he stalked out of the room. As he proceeded from thence through the gallery to his own apartment, his sister was not a little scandalized to hear this zealous puritan and staunch republican vent his displeasure at the unwelcome and inopportune summons he had just received in as naughty an imprecation on the parliament as ever passed the lips of a rantipole cavalier, while Althea, whose ear it likewise reached, as if to be ever in opposition to him, felt inclined, for the first time in her life, to invoke a blessing upon the round-heads-for the unlooked-for and unhopd-for

respite their mandate had afforded her, not only from her abhorrent nuptials with Colonel Briggs, but even from his hated presence for an indefinite period.

Even before the bustle and turmoil of his departure had wholly ceased, there was a brightening in her eyes, and a soft tint of colour stealing over her wan cheek ; her pulse became more regular, and her manner more composed. The physician whom Mrs. Kezia had summoned to her assistance pronounced that her illness, brought on by violent agitation, had taken a favourable turn. Could Colonel Briggs have witnessed her altered manner and appearance, in the course of a very few hours after his departure, he would most undoubtedly have returned to his first opinion, that she had feigned a serious indisposition for the purpose of beguiling him into a further delay of his espousals. He would have sworn that another time nothing less than seeing her shrouded and confined

should prevail on him to excuse her attendance at the marriage altar.

Nevertheless, Althea was guiltless of deception. She had in the first instance been fearfully overwhelmed and crushed beneath the deadly pressure of a blow, long expected, it is true, but not the less terrible on that account when it, at last, descended. Her frame, unable to support the mental conflict she endured, manifested its weakness, and proved her best defence in an hour when strength would have availed her nothing. Yet when the weight of that agonizing pressure was suddenly removed from her mind, the overpoised machine, that had been so powerfully affected, recovered its balance as suddenly, and with the happy elasticity of youth, was speedily restored to much of its pristine vigour.

“ ‘Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning,’ ” said Mrs. Kezia, as she observed, with unalloyed delight, the

rapid improvement in the health and spirits of her fair kinswoman, after the departure of the colonel. “Yet,” she added, “rash, unthinking girl, last night you hesitated not to fly audaciously in the face of that Providence which was, even then, preparing this deliverance for you. Thus it ever is with those blind and rebellious mortals who impiously commit the act of self-destruction, instead of trustingly relying on the grace of the Almighty Ruler of events, who is at all times compassionate to his creatures; they wait not for his merciful dispensations, and actually render his goodness of no avail. Had you not been marvellously withheld from your meditated act last night, the same circumstances would have happened this morning; but the rising sun would in vain have brought the respite from the fate you dreaded; it would have beheld you a corpse. Woe, indeed, to erring, short-sighted creatures of clay, when they madly strive to wrest the disposal of their destinies from the

hands of their Creator. Shall the clay rebel against the potter who moulds it according to his will?"

Althea bowed submissively to these reflections which her worthy kinswoman addressed to her in the manner but not in the tone of reproof. She had indeed been struck with awe and admiration at the manner in which relief had been vouchsafed to her, at a moment when she had deemed all aid was vain. She had humbled herself in trembling adoration, and acknowledged that she had received help, in the fearful crisis of her sore distress, from a source from whence she had not looked for it, and comfort where she had not sought it; since, in the anguish of her spirit, she had not addressed one supplication for succour to Him who alone had power to avert the evil she dreaded. That evil, it is true, was but respited for a time; but what changes might not a day, an hour, a minute bring forth?

There are those who would barter the whole world for one hour's suspension of a sentence which they look upon as inevitable. So felt Althea in regard to her marriage with Briggs. The vow, it is true, was still upon her soul; but its gloomy weight was in a manner removed by the indefinite absence of him to whom it was pledged. He had gone forth to share in all the vicissitudes of the red campaign. Althea did not dare examine carefully the depths of her own heart, lest she should convict herself of the sin of wishing the death of a fellow-creature. She would not actually own, even to herself, that she did wish for the death of her betrothed; yet thus far she acknowledged, that some death-commissioned ball might as well execute its warrant on him as on a better man; and when she heard that his regiment was ordered on a service of peculiar danger, she began to believe that Briggs's death was certain to happen, if there were any truth in

Merab's predictions ; and that there was truth in such prophecies she, in common with all sorts and classes of people, in that era, firmly believed.

Colonel Briggs, however, seemed to bear a charmed life : the diurnals detailed the slaughters that had twice thinned his regiment, yet they spake of himself as unwounded and enjoying excellent health. His own letters to his sister corroborated these accounts ; they contained besides some guarded grumblings on the unfair partiality of the general, in putting him upon such perilous service, which, although he did his duty as a stout soldier, it was easy to perceive was little to his taste. He expressed no slight dissatisfaction at the promotion of several very unbeloved persons, to hold high and easy posts of great honour and advantage in the Commonwealth. He also spoke with excessive bitterness on the probability of being detained from Calgarth Hall, on an arduous service, for months to

come. These passages from his letters gave infinite satisfaction to his betrothed.

Philipson was also absent from the Long Holme, engaged in the royal cause. Althea hoped that, in the active occupation of loyal service, he might shake off the despondency of a lover. Yet dear as his happiness was to her, she was not willing that he should purchase it by utter forgetfulness of her: what woman's heart could bear such idea? But Althea was too fondly convinced of the devotedness of Philipson's attachment, to doubt of his remembrance failing for a moment; and though reason told her that she was lost to him, yet love was ever ready to find excuse for her thinking of nothing else; and she was too happy in indulging in such musings to put an end to them by the force of strong resolve. Hope, indeed, was playing round her heart once more: from whence it sprang she knew not; but the consequence was that health revisited her faded cheek, and restored its

former elasticity to her languid step. She was grateful for the tranquil solitude of Calgarth, under the affectionate care of her highly-principled, though rigid, kinswoman; yet all sternness had long ceased from the manners of Mrs. Kezia, who now treated even the faults of Althea with that indulgence which showed how far she had won on this heretofore austere recluse. With all her imperfections, Althea was knitted to the very heartstrings of Kezia Briggs, who even sacrificed her prejudices to her affections for her young relative, and forbore to rail at king, cavaliers, and bishops in her presence. Althea was truly sensible of this friendship, and returned it by showing the same tender and respectful attention that she would have done to a beloved parent.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE was one person in Calgarth Hall, to whom the growing affection of Mrs. Kezia Briggs for her young kinswoman gave sensible dissatisfaction: this was no other than the redoubtable Mrs. Kerenhappuch Crossthwaite, who likewise surveyed with extreme indignation the toleration with which the “Midianitish woman,” as in the absence of the heads of the family, she always styled Althea, was considered by the chaplain. She took it much amiss that pious Master Elkanah Nobbs, instead of joining her in denouncing judgments on the “proud court beauty, who wore curled ringlets, slashed sleeves, and Vandyke points,

to her own shame and the scandal of all sober-minded Christian people," observed, in reply to her fulminations in respect to them : "That these carnalities had, in the first instance, been a rebuke and an eyesore to him ; but now that he was accustomed to see fair Mistress Woodville wear them, he thought there was less sin in them than he had at first opined ; moreover, they became her so well, that he thought, he should scarcely affect the damsel in other 'tiring."

"So well !" responded the displeased spinster of fifty and five summers ; "so well, quotha ? Why, Master Nobbs—why, my precious Elkanah—am I then to understand that you are so sinfully led, as to have a liking for this daughter of Midian ; this witch, this scoffer ?"

"Nay, nay, good Kerenhappuch, you go too far, both in your surmises respecting my feelings towards the damsel, and the railing accusations which you bring against her,"

rejoined the chaplain, in a temporizing tone. "You do not take into pitiful consideration, as behoves you to do, worthy sister, that Mistress Woodville hath been bred up by the lion-like man of Moab, her father, in the camp of the enemy, and that she hath all the presumptuous vanities of untamed youth cleaving unto her."

"And is it these things that have caused thee to affect the godless vessel, Master Nobbs?" demanded Kerenhappuch, in a tone of suppressed anger.

"Verily, verily, I perceive that I should pleasure thee, Kerenhappuch, if I were to profess that mine eye were evil towards the maiden," said Elkanah, shaking his head; "but know that, so far from cherishing any ill will against her, I am, in a measure, ensnared by her outward comeliness and pleasant speech; and though she be stiffnecked, a walker in her own ways, and perversely holdeth back her ears from my goodly

pourings forth (for which, peradventure, her hour of inclining hath not yet arrived); I, nevertheless, feel a certain brightening upon me when she entereth, like as when one suddenly beholdeth a sunbeam glancing forth at the noontide of a gloomy day.”

“Grant me patience! for I verily believe thou art beside thyself to-day, Master Nobbs,” cried the indignant ’tire-woman. “Talk of likening that dark creature to a sunbeam, indeed?” continued she, stroking back the effulgent folds of her own red locks.

“Doubtless she is fair to look upon, albeit her glossy hair hath the darkest colouring of the chestnut, and her eye is black and languishing as that of a young fawn. I could scarcely marvel me that the colonel should be stark impatient for the day of their espousals, did I not know that the temper of his mind, towards her, savoureth rather of the nature of spitefulness than that quality of the natural affections which men call love.”

“No wonder, Master Elkanah, no wonder,” responded Kerenhappuch; “my master is a man of the Lord, and hath too much discretion to garner up his affections on such a vain toy as this Mistress Woodville. I always considered the colonel a man of excellent judgment.”

“He shows but little of it, I opine, in regard to this unbefitting marriage, for the which he is ready to barter his peace on earth and his hopes in heaven,” returned the chaplain: “and the maiden’s heart set even unto idolatry, the while, upon yon godless dare-all, Master Philipson, of the Holme. It will be a perilous risk for a man of the colonel’s years and outward similitude, any how, to take a wife so loathing unto him and so loving to another; and that other, good lack, a man who would not scruple to make him eat cold iron at the altar, though he were surrounded by an army to defend him from his desperation. Nor would *she* scruple, I fear me, to

wed point-blank with her sometime betrothed lover, Philipson, though his blade were streaming red with the blood of him who hath extorted a vain vow, from her lips, to take him for her wedded husband."

"Ay, ay, Master Nobbs, I believe you," responded Kerenhappuch, with a groan; "she is graceless enough for anything; but it is to be hoped the colonel will clip her wings and break her spirit a bit, when she becomes his wife. And to tell you the truth, sweet Master Elkanah, I wish that day were come and past, for she isn't fit to be her own mistress; and as for my lady, Mistress Kezia Briggs, she spoils her outright. I'm wholly weary of looking on and witnessing her folly with the brat. It's 'my child,' and 'my dear,' and 'cousin Althea' (fie on the heathen name!) at every word; and instead of making her read John Calvin and other precious divines, or keeping her to some decent employment, she'll let her twang her lute-strings

and hang over godless poesies, by the six hours together; and will you credit it, Master Nobbs? I came in upon them, unawares, the other day, and found my mistress with a skein of rose-coloured floss silk upon her wrists, which she was holding for this daughter of Midian to reel off for her 'broidering vanities. Out upon such follies, say I."

"I do remember me," said the chaplain, "the colonel himself proffering to do somewhat of the kind for her, when she first came to Calgarth, but she tossed her head and would none of his help."

"The more fool he for tendering it," observed Mrs. Crossthwaite. "I am always ready to bite my lips when I see any one civil to the proud puppet. I wonder what the gentles can see in her, or how my master ever came to think of wedding with such a graceless creature."

"That has always been a marvel to me," rejoined Nobbs; "for in other things the

colonel is, as you wisely observe, good Mistress Crossthwaite, a man of sense and discretion; but I saw which way the cat jumped (if I may borrow a profane proverb) the very first day he brought her to the Hall. You mind how brim full of sorrow she was then, poor bairn; and her long dark locks hung down uncurled; yet they had a pretty wild look with them, as they floated over her black velvet riding-tire; and that looped-up hat she wore, with the drooping feathers and diamond brooch in it, became her well."

"Fie upon you! how you talk of her worldly vanities, Master Nobbs," interrupted Kerenhappuch, angrily: "I should wonder now if any pious woman, like myself or my lady, or that gracious woman, the old Lady Deborah Ricketts, of Flookborough, would be seen to dishonour our heads with such a covering?"

"It would strangely misbecome your years and featuring if you were, I judge," replied the chaplain, with a look of surprise.

“Oh, for the matter of that,” retorted Kerenhappuch, tossing her head conceitedly, “if it were not for the sinfulness of wearing such harlotish head-gear — however that is neither here nor there—I never was a beauty, I thank God! Some people, indeed, have said of me—but no matter for that—I don’t value outward charms—not I. And as for these perilous adornments of plaited hair and the hues of the skin, why should one be vain of them, I prythee? I defy my worst enemy to say that I was ever wont to boast myself on those perishing things of the body, which all do pass away in the twinkling of an eye.”

“Very true, very true, my worthy sister in the faith. I am glad to find thee so enlightened respecting the perishable nature of all human possessions, specially those which are miscalled the graces of the body. I doubt me not thou wert a prudent maiden in the dangerous season of youth and comeliness, which snares have long since departed from

thee," responded the worthy chaplain, in a sympathizing tone.

This observation, which was made in the simplicity of his heart, was anything but pleasing to the spinster, who retorted with great asperity, which, however, she softened into a sort of feline show of meekness, as she concluded her rejoinder :

"Indeed, Master Nobbs, I must say you are rather rude in your remarks, but you mean it for my good, I know. I see you are fearful lest I should be carried away, like Mistress Woodville, so far as to make dress a study and beauty an idol."

"Not so, worthy Kerenhappuch. I never wronged you by opining that a chosen vessel of goodly gifts, like yourself, could ever sink into so complete a slough of vanity as to glory in the similitude of the outward woman," said the complaisant minister, ogling her very affectionately.

"Oh, sweet Master Elkanah!—most pre-

cious pot of ointment!" she rejoined, "you would not sure endanger my godly discretion by bringing to my thoughts the things whereof I might boast myself, if I were worldward like unto Mistress Woodville."

"Far be it from me, good Kerenhappuch, to be a snare unto thee to lead thee into the fearful paths of self-idolatry," said Elkanah Nobbs. "I know the frailty of the flesh too well."

"Yea, sweet Master Elkanah, and I also am aware of the same; but I refrain myself from its delusions, covering the brightness of my locks with this close-pinched coif and pinnars, lest the eyes of men should be beguiled into looking too steadfastly upon the same."

"In sooth, good Mistress Crossthwaite, thou art discreet in thy doings, for the colour of red is violent and betokeneth a flame; therefore it is well to subdue its strength of tint, with a modest shading of white lawn. I

speak not in regard to myself. Heaven forbid that I should disparage the colour of the hair which He hath ordained to be the covering of thy head. All colours are good in themselves, and it is the perverseness of human vanity alone which inclineth men to cast a capricious value on the auburn, the golden, the chestnut, or the black, in preference to those disparaged hues of red or dusky, which are equally His work ; therefore comfort, good Kerenhap-puch, for thy locks shall, peradventure, be encircled with a crown of glory in paradise, while the auburn, the golden, and the ebon braids and ringlets, which have presumptuously boasted themselves in their glossy beauty, may be singeing and frizzing in fire never to be quenched. Thy hair was perchance a sorrow to thee in the days of youthful vanity, but that sorrow hath worked profitable things for thee, I doubt me not, since it prevented thee from wasting thy precious time in the sinful idlement of

braiding, curling, and puffing it, to catch the wanton eyes of lewd young men."

"Upon my word, Master Nobbs, you are talking as strangely about my hair," interrupted the mortified spinster, "as if you opined I covered it from any other motive than the holy one of preventing its brightness from being an enticement to the eyes of the gentles who sometimes dine at the colonel's table."

"Truly, Kerenhappuch, it was a point of discretion in thee," responded the simple chaplain, "since few persons can brook their outward defects or disfigurements of colour or featuring, to be made matter of sport withal to their betters."

"Disfigurements and defects!" shrieked Kerenhappuch Crossthwaite, whose patience had now arrived at its *ne plus ultra*, and not all her prudent care to preserve the only suitor she had ever acquired could restrain the boiling over of her wrath.

Vanity is not confined, as some erroneously imagine, to the breasts of the young and lovely; and the idea which the high-born beauty who had been the poet's theme and the courtly gallant's toast entertained of her charms fell many score degrees below the estimate at which the mature puritanical waiting-maid of Mistress Kezia Briggs rated her own personal attractions. She could, in truth, endure no longer hearing so many *mal-à-propos* compliments to her godliness and discretion at the expense of her outward woman, and at length she gave vent to her displeasure in such a torrent of angry egotism, that the astonished chaplain, who had addressed his ill-appreciated commendations and consolations to her in the idea that he was delighting her with a seasonable pouring forth of comfortable things, fled from before her face in utter dismay, and never again ventured himself in a *tête-à-tête* with her. Moreover, he from that hour gave up all thoughts of com-

mitting matrimony with a person capable of indulging in such groundless transports of fury. He had been wont to make it his boast that he never resolved on any action of importance without due deliberation. Caution was a leading trait in his character, and had, in the first instance, rendered him somewhat cold to the affectionate advances of Mrs. Kerenhappuch Crossthwaite, who was five years his senior; but her persevering attentions had at length so far impressed him in her favour, that he had employed the last ten years of his life in debating with himself the momentous point, to marry or not to marry, the said Kerenhappuch, and the inclination to marry had, during the second five years of that period, gained the preponderance over the timidity of confirmed old-bachelorhood, especially since the ghostly intrusions by which Calgarth Hall had been so outrageously disturbed from the time Colonel Briggs had taken up his general

abode there. It was then that the poor chaplain, who was by no means exempt from the superstitious belief in supernatural appearances so prevalent among all classes at that period, was peculiarly sensible of the desolateness of his condition, and had sighed for the comfort, to say nothing of the protection of a nocturnal companion in the person of a discreet and dutiful spouse.

Under the influence of these feelings, he had actually made some lover-like approaches towards the staid spinster in the unusually tender manner in which he returned his grateful acknowledgments for her services of starching and ironing his shirts, collar-bands and cuff-bands, and darning his hose, all which truly conjugal offices she had performed for him *con amore* for some years, and so entirely to his satisfaction, that he could think of no person so fitting to be legally entitled to these duties as the one who had proved herself so ably qualified to fulfil them.

He was also accustomed to dwell with much complacency on the excellent possets she was wont to prepare for his nightly beverage after the fatigues of his chapel duties, in which she was by no means sparing of the good creatures sack, brandy, nutmeg, and white sugar-candy. Multifold, too, were the dainty tid-bits that she was accustomed to provide, in a sly sort of way, for his private refecton in his study, of all which the good man entertained pleasing reminiscences ; so that, like the single drop that constantly trickled on the block of marble, she was insensibly wearing her passage to his heart ; and could she but have restrained the ebullitions of her offended vanity so far as to have hearkened with mild temper to those reflections and moralizations on the unlucky colour of her hair, which poor Elkanah, who was perfectly indifferent to the circumstance, meant out of kindness and sympathy, she would, in all probability, have secured the

prize for which she had been starching, ironing, darning, and cooking for so many years. But in one unguarded moment she had overthrown the promising fruit for which she had toiled so long and patiently. She had committed herself beyond recovery by rashly making the powers of her tongue known to her inamorato. Elkanah Nobbs was a man of peace, a votary of ease and comfort; his ears were the most sensitive members of his body. He stood aghast on perceiving the precipice on the verge of which he had tottered for so many years, and had a mine of gunpowder exploded at his feet, it could scarcely have occasioned him greater consternation than this unexpected effervescence of temper on the part of Kerenhappuch.

“It was well it took place before it was too late,” he said, and quietly retreated back to his old ground of determined celibacy, and became a confirmed bachelor for life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE woods of Calgarth were only budding when Althea was brought thither, a sorrowful stranger, from the midland counties, in reluctant obedience to her deceased mother's will. She had seen those lovely woods expand into all their spring verdure and summer glory, and now the russet shades of autumn had embrowned them, and were fast fading into the sere and yellow tints of decay. The flowers had faded and were gone, and many of the leaves had already fallen from the trees, and were scattered by the fitful blasts of early autumn.

“As mutable has been my destiny since

my reluctant abode here," said she to Mrs. Kezia Briggs, after making this observation, as they sat together contemplating the setting sun from one of the broad mullioned windows in the long state drawing-room, which commanded an extensive view of Windermere, with its guardian hills, rich woods, and intermediate slopes of green turf.

"The leafless spring," continued Althea, pensively dwelling on her simile, "resembled the melancholy, dreary state of my feelings on my first arrival. The love of him, of whom you wot well, but whose name must pass these lips no more, formed my brief season of summer brightness, which was prematurely eclipsed, and for ever, by the adverse influences of our evil destinies in an hour I looked not for. My fatal plight to your brother was the withering autumn blight which hath desolated all the hopes of life, and his return will prove the wintry

blast that will scatter them in death, and thus complete the parallel.”

She involuntarily cast a fond, lingering look at the Long Holme island as she concluded, and, covering her face with her hands, endeavoured to conceal the tears which, in spite of her efforts to repress them, gushed to her eyes and flowed through the slender white fingers. At last she abandoned herself to the indulgence of her grief, and sobbed aloud with convulsive vehemence.

“How long, Althea,” said Mrs. Kezia Briggs, in the accent of tender reproof, “how long will you continue ungratefully distrustful of that Providence which has so often manifested its signal care of you by interposing for your deliverance at moments when your perverse heart, in its sinful despair, was ready to exclaim: ‘Is there yet any help for me? Am I not a vessel clean forgotten, and put out of sight?’ not considering that thou art but as clay in the hand

of the potter, and that whatever is appointed unto thee, that must thou fulfil in the time of thine earthly pilgrimage, whether it be of good or evil."

"Woe is me," cried Althea, bitterly, "for it is evil, and not good, that is appointed unto me."

"Who told thee so, rebellious child?" said her kinswoman, rising from her seat in the energetic impulse of the moment, and looking down upon her from the full height of her tall, unbending form, on which the iron hand of approaching age had, as yet, laid no curve. "Who made thee, Althea Woodville, acquainted with the secret purposes of Him in whose all-wise hand rest the hidden dispensations of the unknown future?"

"Alas!" replied Althea, "it is the presentiment of the coming evil that is heavy here;" she pressed her hands upon her heart as she spoke, and sorrowfully shaking her head, added, "it is as though the approach-

ing tempest cast its darkest shadow before it."

Mistress Kezia Briggs re-seated herself with a look of uneasiness, and taking the hand of her young relative, said :

" It is, indeed, matter of deep concern to me, Althea, to see you rebelliously striving against the decrees of your heavenly Father, and presumptuously inferring that they are evil towards you merely because your blinded eyes cannot discriminate sufficiently to perceive their wisdom ; then, yielding to a gloomy life-destroying despondency, which may, in reality, be as causeless as it is sinful."

" I know that I am a grief to you," replied Althea, "and I deserve not that you should not only bear with my waywardness, but endeavour to reason with my despair."

" That despair is the offspring of earthly passions and creature idolatry," returned Mistress Kezia Briggs, fixing her penetrating eyes on the face of her young kinswoman.

“Oh! if you knew how vehemently I have striven against it!” exclaimed Althea, clasping her hands wildly together.

“Ay, but you have not striven in the right way,” returned Mistress Kezia. “You have neither used the armour of faith nor the weapons of prayer. You have resisted in your own strength, and therefore have you been foiled.”

“I feel the kindness of your motive, dearest madam, in thus addressing to me the counsels of wisdom,” said Althea, “but pardon me if I observe that those only who have had the painful experience of what I feel are qualified to speak on the subject, and such would know too well the hopelessness of reasoning with my madness, for I am aware it deserves no gentler name.” She turned her face to the window, and wept afresh.

“Poor, unhappy child of pride and passion, I would you knew how deeply my heart bleeds for you,” said Mrs. Kezia Briggs,

taking her in her arms; "and yet, Althea Woodville, there is much of self-created misery, and yet more of self-delusion, in all this."

"Alas!" said Althea, "it is easy for those who never felt a wound to moralize on the weakness of those in whose hearts the newly-planted arrow yet rankles."

"Mistake me not," rejoined her kinswoman, mildly. "I meant not, Althea, to say you did not suffer. Unhappily, it is too apparent that youthful spirits, health, and life itself, are sinking beneath the strife of those morbid feelings which are destroying your peace here and your hopes hereafter; but I will aver that much, very much, of your present unhappiness, arises from your own false sensibility, which leads you to nourish your secret griefs, instead of resolutely combating them with the weapons which I have pointed out to you; but you hear me with an averted ear, and instead of

fixing your hope where alone it will be found bright, substantial, and unfading, you seek your rest in things in which rest never yet was found; and, as if that were not enough to ensure your present sorrow, you furthermore excite the most agonizing apprehensions, by meeting those evils afar off which may never approach to disquiet you."

"I acknowledge it all," said Althea, "and more than all you have described; but, indeed, you know not—you cannot know—my feelings. You never felt as I feel."

A deeper shade of paleness overspread the features of Mistress Kezia Briggs, and her lip was agitated by a momentary convulsion, as she replied, in a voice that had an unwonted hoarseness in its tones:

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy. Thinkest thou, Althea, that the sorrow of the world, that worketh death, is reserved for the lovely alone, or that the heart of the

harshly-featured and swart-complexioned is insensible to the vain regrets and sinful conflicts which, in the perilous season of youth, assail and punish those who rear idol shrines in the secret tabernacles of their misguided souls to perishing creatures of erring clay like themselves? Verily, they reap of the things which they have sown. Was I, Kezia Briggs, less foolish than my kinswomen and friends of the generation that is gone by? I trow not. Vain, vain, and self-deceiving as the rest, Althea, was I, and less excusable withal, for I was aware that there was nought in my outward similitude that could win the heart of a youthful gallant. I cherished, in all its wild excess, that sinful passion, which doth, more than aught beside of Satan's strong temptations, lead the heart into forgetfulness of God. He sought me not; and had he recked of my mad folly, he would have smiled in scorn, and said—no matter what. He never knew that the homely Kezia Briggs

the daughter of him whom he haughtily styled the hind of his grandfather, cherished for him a feeling so unmeet. But think not, my child, that I am about to make thee the confidante of a love tale of which I was the heroine. I speak of that, which never before escaped the door of my lips, to show thee, Althea, that the physician who would fain prescribe a heavenly balm for thy malady hath had experience of the same sharp and profitless pain. And, oh! the darkness of that season of alienation from my heavenly Father, when I blindly exalted one of his erring creatures into rivalry with Him who hath said: 'Give me thy heart.' In mercy and in wisdom hath He required it, Althea; for 'eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, to conceive the joy which he hath prepared for those who love him.' Could you, my child, but once taste and see how sweet it is, you would not drink thus deeply of the bitter

draughts of earthly engrossments, but, casting all your care upon Him who careth for you, you would resign yourself in holy trust to His gracious dispensations without fear or anxiety for the future. And why, Althea, take you such fruitless thought for the morrow? ‘Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’ ”

“ Sufficient, indeed, for *this day*, is the evil thereof ! ” exclaimed Althea, starting from her seat in an agony of grief and alarm, for the clear, penetrating eyes that had so recently been turned on her face with persuasive eloquence in their glance, became suddenly fixed and rayless, and her friend, her protectress, and kind relative, without one previous symptom of illness, fell back in her chair, and expired, with the words of truth and inspiration on her lips !

CHAPTER XIX.

RELUCTANT to believe, yet too deeply impressed with the awful certainty of the bereavement she had sustained, Althea had immediate recourse to every means of restoring suspended animation, and assisted with anxious solicitude to convey the still warm, but lifeless form, of her revered kinswoman to her own apartment, and to undress and place her in bed, while messengers were despatched in haste to the nearest town to procure surgical and medical assistance. This was obtained earlier than might have been expected, but arrived only to confirm the fearful presage that had fallen cold on Althea's

heart from the first. To satisfy her, indeed, everything which human skill could suggest in such cases was done. They opened a vein in the arm of the deceased, but the blood refused to flow; and after the usual remedies had been fruitlessly applied, they pronounced that the vital spark was extinct, and that her death was occasioned by a stroke of apoplexy, which had instantaneously severed the imperceptible cord which, for a time, mysteriously connects the immortal principle of life with its frail and perishing tabernacle of clay.

Scarcely more life-like than the cold form before her, Althea stood beside the bed of death, in rooted immobility, gazing on all that remained of her last friend and only protector. Much she wondered that her tears did not burst forth like the overflow of a torrent; but her senses were, in a manner, numbed by the violence of the appallingly sudden blow she had sustained,

and the fount of grief remained sealed and frozen up.

Sometimes she asked herself if it were indeed true that the falcon eye, which had looked so steadily upon hers but a moment previous to this awful event, was now for ever shrouded in the last long eclipse; and the energetic lip, which had so solemnly applied the words of divine wisdom to her reproof and comfort, was indeed hushed in the silence of death.

Hour after hour passed away, and found Althea insensible of the lapse of time, and of everything but her own bereavement. Much as Althea had respected her deceased kinswoman, she had never been aware how much she had loved her till she saw her thus. Oh! then every opposition of sentiment, every clashing of opinion, and every difference of faith and party were forgotten, and her sterling virtues, her generosity of temper, her lofty rectitude, exalted piety, and essential kindness, were alone remembered.

Of herself, she thought not ; scarcely did she feel the utter loneliness of her situation, or comprehend the singular influence which the unexpected death of Mistress Kezia Briggs might, in all probability, make in her destiny, till she was roused from the exclusive indulgence of her melancholy musings, beside the inanimate remains of her revered kinswoman, by the repeated interruptions which she received from the servants, male and female, who applied to her for orders and directions alike for the household affairs, and the melancholy preparations for the performance of the last offices for their departed mistress, which at length apprised her of the fact that the principal authority in the house, where she had hitherto dwelt rather as a captive than a guest, had now unexpectedly devolved upon herself. And she who had never before been called upon to think, act, or decide in any domestic matters, beyond the arrangement of a china

cabinet, the drapery of a dressing-glass, or the light in which a picture was to be hung, and was inexperienced as a babe in the theory, as well as the execution, of the practical duties of the mistress of a large establishment found herself unexpectedly placed in a situation of supreme command, not only over a puritan household, but a garrison withal.

The imperative necessity of exerting all the energies of her naturally strong mind in a situation of such difficulty, compelled Althea to restrain her feelings, and assume, at least, the appearance of self-possession ; and in this she succeeded in a manner that, in some degree, produced the effect of composing and reassuring the terrified paralysed domestics. The mournful calmness of her demeanour, however, afforded abundant matter of invidious remark on the part of Kerenhap-puch, who considered a due succession of tears, shrieks, swoonings, and hysterics, as indispensable proofs of sensibility and regard

for the deceased; and when Althea—in the absence of every person of whom she might have sought counsel, and obtained the necessary information as to the arrangements for the funeral of Mrs. Kezia Briggs—applied to Kerenhappuch, who, from her age and experience, she naturally concluded would be perfectly competent to suggest everything proper to be done on so melancholy an occasion, she chose to exhibit the most dogged sullenness and consequential parade of grief.

“She was sure,” she said, in reply to a question that had immediate reference to the last offices to the recently deceased, “she could not talk on such a distressing subject; for her part she had loved the dear departed saint too well to be able to think, much less to speak of winders, and shrouds, and coffins, for her precious body, before it was well cold;” and then she delivered herself of a well-got-up burst of hysterical sobbing, and

sinking down upon a settee, began, gradually to increase her sobs to shrieks.

Althea, whose heartfelt and true sorrow revolted with indignant scorn from this over-acted affectation of violent grief, rang the bell, and summoning one of the housemaids to her assistance, left her, to give audience to Joseph Foxcraft, the butler, who had most earnestly and repeatedly petitioned for a personal conference with her young ladyship, as he had a matter of some importance to communicate.

CHAPTER XX.

“IN the first pleace, my leady,” said the sly, sleek-looking *maître d’hotel*, surveying Althea with a knowing sort of glance from beneath his half-shut, sleepy, grey eyes, “I have to communicate to your leadyship requirement on the peart of troopers o’ garrison, for an increased allowance o’ creature comforts, to keep up their spirits, *quo* Measter Bethuliel, by reason o’ leate awfu’ visitation o’ the Haugh in the sudden death o’ my worshipful mistress, and in case o’ refusal, to render up to their discretion, the keys o’ cellar and buttery. They charged me to tell your young leadyship, they would aw turn

cavaliers, and render up the Haugh to the malignant major at Long Holme, on condition of his letting them hae the benefit o' pillage!"

Under other circumstances, Althea would have had difficulty in suppressing a smile, or even might have laughed outright at this intimation. After brief consideration, she replied:

"In sooth, Master Foxcraft, you must act as you think most prudent, in this business, for we are wholly in the power of the garrison; and were we even to return a decided negative to their demand, it would be to little purpose, I apprehend."

"T' measter was alway awfu' close o'er t' wine, could tell preceesely to odd bottle, how much suld be in cellar binns, and he'll meake a wofu' branglement wi' both of we, an we let troopers rin their ain gaits in drinking cellar dry," responded the butler, shaking his head. "And so I was guessin',

my leady, an it suld meet wi' your good liking, that we had better honourably wi'hold the keys, and defy t' garrison to do their worst; for then the loss of wine would na lie at our doors, and we suld 'scape aw reckoning wi' colonel about t' loss, that wou't aw be laid to mutinous garrison or cavaliers at t' Long Holme, where, I'm guessin'" continued the sagacious Joseph, placing the tip of his forefinger to the side of his nose, "that we s'al aw be carried away captive, as the Israelites fra' Zion were, to Babylon!"

Althea presently comprehended, from the drift of this speech, that Master Joseph Foxcraft was very desirous of impressing her with not only the possibility, but the expediency of taking such measures as would render Philipson the master of the place, and the arbiter of her destiny.

Situated, however, as she at present was, she felt that it would be decidedly dis-

honourable to abuse the trust that had unexpectedly devolved upon her. She, therefore, without taking any notice of the covert hints and insinuations of the trusty butler, directed him to content the troopers by allowing them to have everything they demanded.

“And that will be aw and aw within t’e Haugh that can be eaten, drunk, or pocketed, not e’en bating t’ supper that is just now at kitchen fire, cooking for your leadyship’s a’n refection,” observed the butler, with evident pique, as he withdrew.

After the lapse of about two hours, Master Foxcraft again petitioned to be admitted to the honour of a conference with Althea, to learn her pleasure, on business of consequence.

“Upon my word, Master Foxcraft!” said the young lady, seating herself with an air of great perplexity, after he had submitted

to her consideration, and required her decision respecting a variety of matters relating both to the domestic economy of the Hall and the preliminary arrangements for the funeral of his late mistress, "I am wholly unacquainted with these matters; and those who might assist my inexperience with advice, refuse to speak on the subject. I will, however, consult the chaplain, who may possibly, be able to give me the needful information on these points; or, perhaps, as he is a confidential person in the family, it would be more proper for him to take the responsibility of issuing orders himself."

"It is not preceesely on t' quality an' colour o' velvet for outward trapping o' coffin, nor whether it were to be blazoned wi' scutcheon-ing, or herald work, or plain, that I made bould to seek a sight of your leadyship's own feace," said Joseph Foxcraft, drawing nearer to Althea with a knowing glance, and lower-

ing his voice to a sort of mysterious whisper ;
“ but just to be axing ye the question whet’er
or no, it be your pleasure to admit the gentle,
yonder, that would be fain to see ye, an ye be
so minded.” He pointed with his thumb
over his shoulder, in the direction of the lake,
with an expressive wink.

“ I am surprised, Master Foxcraft !” said
Althea, “ that you should even mention a
stranger to me at such a time, much less
propose admitting one !”

“ Na, my leady ! ’tis no sic a stranger
arter aw, for the gentle is your own blood
kinsman, who is o’er well kenned o’ you
this mony a day, and a’ has coomed frae
king’s own court at Oxenford, to seek your
feace, and no marvel on it that a suld, for
its ae bonny, and he’s a likelissime young
gallant, to my mind, as ever steppit o’er
sands.”

“ My cousin, Sir Anthony Woodville !”
exclaimed Althea, “ I know not whether it

be possible to see him in this house; I think not."

"Surely, my leady thou'st not forgotten that thou'rt neaw mistress o'er aw at Calgarth Haugh, and will so bide till ot'er word can reach us frae colonel, or himsel should coom, which thing seems na sa likely for a time, Measter Nobbs said, when he started off Sameavill Stunner post crack to him at York, wi' letters that gied account o' this awfu' deceasement o' my late leady, and so I reckon that for the present, your leadyship is free to do as ye list in aw things, and o' course to see what coommers ye please."

"I do not require any information on the line of conduct I may think proper to observe in the house of my guardian Colonel Briggs during his absence, from any one, much less from his servants," returned Althea, gravely.

"Craving your leadyship's pardon, no

offence, I hope," said the butler, in some confusion; "but it's na Sir Anthony Woodville, arter aw, that's so wode to see your feace, just neaw, that a'd be fain to gie one o' his sparkling e'en an he might but just get glint o' you wi' tot'er; but a gentle o' good descents, and your kinsman born, as I said before, o' your leady mother's blood, or rather, I'm thinking, I should ha' said, your leady mother was of his, for she was a Briggs, o' Calgarth (craving your ladyship's excuse for telling you what you're well advised on), and he o' whom I'm talking, has no such in his veins."

"Of what, and of whom are you talking, Master Foxcraft?" cried Althea, impatiently, for she perceived that his prolixity was interminable, and saw no other way of bringing him to the point than breaking in upon his pompous harangue. She had better have let it alone, for Joseph Foxcraft was one of those determined persons who will take their own

time in delivering any information of which they may chance to be the possessors. I have known such people, after twaddling for an hour, and using the most provoking circumlocution to avoid arriving at the desired conclusion of their tale, before they have expended their proposed number of words, if interrupted by the weary bystanders, in the hope of shortening their intolerable verbosity, coolly join the broken thread of their narrative, and spin it out to a more annoying length than they had at first designed to do.

Joseph Foxcraft belonged to this class, and with a profound reverence to Althea, and a courteous “Craving your leadyship’s pardon, but you’ve just dea’ved it aw out o’ brain wi’ your saying,” he deliberately retraced his ground, till at length, Althea thoroughly provoked and wearied, rose abruptly to quit the room. The old man then, with some vivacity, stepping between her and the door, whispered : “T’ gentle, my leady, that thou beest so

stark impatient about, is the same who sends hee this bit o' paper, which thou 'lt be fain to read, I guess !”

He offered a letter, as he concluded, on the superscription of which Althea had recognised at a glance, the dearly-loved and well-known characters of Philipson's bold, free hand. She could not and she did not refuse herself the pleasure of receiving it ; and hastening to the solitude of her own apartment, she secured herself from interruption by double-locking the door, though well aware that she had no occasion for such precautions, since Calgarth Hall at that time contained no person whose jealous observations she had reason to apprehend ; yet such was the force of habit that she never entered her own chamber in that mansion, without taking every means in her power for preventing unauthorized intrusion, nor did she now attempt to break the seal of Philipson's letter till she had assured herself that nothing living was near or

could approach her unaware, while thus engaged.

The letter was as follows :

“ Holme House, Windermere.

“ BELOVED ALTHEA,—I arrived at the Long Holme from the army late last night, on special business for the king, which will require my presence for a day or two in this precious nook of the north, when the melancholy intelligence of the awfully sudden death of our worthy kinswoman, Mistress Kezia Briggs, has just been communicated to me, for which I am sincerely grieved ; since, notwithstanding she was the sister of Bat Briggs (which was her misfortune, not her fault) and her disaffection to the king and his loyal cavalier Robert Philipson (her cousin, of two and a half removes distant), and her affection for puritans and roundheads, which perchance proceeded from monomania, she was a woman of rare virtues and excellently good natural

endowments, and one whom I greatly respected, the more especially on account of her kindness to thee, dearest life !

“ I learn also that thou art overwhelmed with sorrow on account of this bereavement. It is impossible, my Althea (for mine I will call thee still, in spite of Bat Briggs and Beelzebub) to hear this without sharing in thy affliction, and I hasten to assure thee of my faithful sympathy in every woe that draws a tear from thee.

“ There is that going on in Calgarth Hall which would enable me without any expenditure of human life, to make myself master of the place, if I essayed one brisk assault from the lake. But this I know, would be most painful to you before the obsequies of your revered kinswoman be duly performed. Fear not, beloved Althea, I would not break in thus rudely upon the indulgence of your grief. I only crave permission to see you, if but for one poor minute, to tender you

my services if there be aught in which I can assist you on the present mournful occasion.

“ Refuse not this slight request to your

“ Devoted

“ ROBERT PHILIPSON.”

In reply to this, Althea, with faltering hand and streaming eyes, wrote :

“ Calgarth Hall.

“ PHILIPSON,—It cannot be ! We must never voluntarily meet again, and least of all in the house of Colonel Briggs.

“ Farewell !

“ I dare not subscribe myself as my fond heart dictates,

“ Your own

“ ALTHEA WOODVILLE.”

In less than an hour Joseph Foxcraft, whom Althea encountered on the staircase, mysteriously, presented her with a second billet from Philipson. It only contained these words :

“ Holme House, Windermere.

“ DEAR HEART,—I will not urge an interview at present, since you are reluctant to it, and I but write these lines to say your will is my law.

“ Command me to the uttermost in aught wherein I can assist you, now and ever, and forget not him who is faithfully and exclusively

“ Yours in life and death,

“ ROBERT PHILIPSON.”

This had been an agitating trial for Althea, and though it had cost her a severe mental conflict, and floods of regretful tears, yet she had the consolation of self-approving feelings, when she reflected that she had acted with becoming firmness and rectitude under the strong temptation. In her present heavy affliction the sight of any friend, especially one so dear to her as Philipson, would have been consoling; for recent as her cause of sorrow had been, she had deeply and intensely

longed to weep on some kind bosom, in a confiding abandonment of grief, casting all her care upon one that cared for her. In this utter desolation and dreary solitude, when none but hirelings were about her, there was not one person to whom she could speak of the distress that weighed upon her young heart; she might have looked around for sympathy in vain.

Elkanah Nobbs was sincerely sorry for the death of his much-venerated patroness, but his whole faculties were so thoroughly absorbed in the labour of composing and committing to memory a sermon which was to be delivered extempore at her funeral, that he was, literally speaking, too much engaged in his engrossing occupation to have one moment to spare for grief, and left all the preparations for that mournful solemnity to the guidance of the only person who truly suffered poignant and unfeigned grief on the occasion—Althea Woodville.

Althea finding herself imperatively called upon for exertion in this emergency, wrote to the family physician who had been summoned to attend the deceased, informing him in concise terms how she was situated, and requesting him to come to Calgarth Hall, and issue the needful directions preparatory to the funeral of her lamented kinswoman. The doctor, who was a friendly, kind-hearted man, readily undertook this office, for which few people were better qualified, for he had been too often the *avant courier* of death not to be perfectly acquainted with everything necessary to be done on such occasions.

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